

TWELVE SERMONS
INTRODUCTORY
TO THE STUDY OF
THE PROPHECIES.
IN TWO VOLUMES.

Vol. I.

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AN
INTRODUCTION
TO THE STUDY OF THE
PROPHECIES

Concerning the CHRISTIAN CHURCH;

AND, IN PARTICULAR,

Concerning the Church of PAPAL ROME:

IN TWELVE SERMONS,

PREACHED IN LINCOLN'S-INN-CHAPEL,

AT THE LECTURE OF

The Right Reverend WILLIAM WARBURTON
Lord Bishop of GLOUCESTER.

By RICHARD HURD, D. D.,
Preacher to the Honourable Society of LINCOLN'S-INN.

*Ita, si potuero, stylo moderabor meo, ut nec ea, quæ supersint,
dicam; nec ea, quæ satis sint, prætermittam.*

Augustin. C. D. l. xvii. c. i.

THE THIRD EDITION.

VOL. I,

L O N D O N,

PRINTED BY W. BOWYER AND J. NICHOLS:
FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND,
MDCCLXXIII.

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AN
INTRODUCTION
TO THE STUDY OF THE
PROPHETS
Concerning the CHRISTIAN CHURCH,
AND IN PARTICULAR,
Concerning the Church of PAPAL ROME;
IN TWELVE SERMONS
PREACHED IN LINCOLN-SHAW.



AT THE
The Right Hon. M. WARRINGTON
LONDON.
BY RICHARD HURD, D.D.
Fellow to the Honorable Society of Lincoln's Inn.
In a former Edition, this tract was sold at one shilling, and is now sold at six pence.
LONDON, C. D. J. 1791, 4s.
THE THIRD EDITION.
VOL. I.

LONDON.
PRINTED BY W. BOWYER AND J. NICHOLS;
FOR T. CADELL, IN THE STRAND.
MDCCLXXXII.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
WILLIAM, LORD MANSFIELD,
LORD CHIEF JUSTICE OF ENGLAND,

AND

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
SIR JOHN EARDLY WILMOT, KNT.

LATE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE

COMMON PLEAS,

TRUSTEES FOR THIS LECTURE,

THE FOLLOWING SERMONS

ARE MOST HUMBL Y INSCRIBED

BY THE AUTHOR,

R. HURD.

LINCOLN'S-INN,
MARCH 2, 1772.

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
WILLIAM, LORD MANSFIELD,
LORD CHIEF JUSTICE OF ENGLAND,

AND
TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
SIR JOHN BARBURY WHITOT, KNT.
LATE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE

COMMONS,
TRUSTEES FOR THE ANTIQUITIES
THE FOLLOWING SERMONS
ARE MOST HUMBLY INSCRIBED

BY THE AUTHOR,

R. HURD

LONDON:
MARCH 1777.

**EXTRACT from the Deed
of Trust for founding this
Lecture,**

AN Indenture, bearing date July
21, 1768, sets forth, " That
" the right reverend WILLIAM
" Lord Bishop of Gloucester has
" transferred the sum of 500*l.*
" *Bank four per cent. annuities con-*
" *solidated*, to the right honourable
" WILLIAM LORD MANSFIELD,

A 4

" Lord

viii *Extract from the DEED of TRUST,*

“ Lord Chief Justice of his Ma-
“ jesty’s Court of King’s Bench,
“ the right honourable SIR JOHN
“ EARDLY WILMOT, Lord Chief
“ Justice of his Majesty’s Court of
“ Common Pleas, and the honoura-
“ ble CHARLES YORKE [a], of Lin-
“ coln’s-Inn, in the county of Mid-
“ dlesex, UPON TRUST, for the pur-
“ pose of founding a *Lecture*, in the

[a] This noble and eminent person was the second son of the Lord Chancellor Hardwicke. He had been, for many years, in the first reputation at the Bar; and, having passed through the offices of Solicitor and Attorney General, was, himself, made Lord Chancellor in January 1770, but died soon after his appointment to that high dignity—*Lucluosum hoc suis; acerbum patriæ; grave bonis omnibus.* —CIC.

“ form

for founding this LECTURE. ix

“ form of a Sermon, To prove the
“ truth of revealed Religion, in general,
“ and of the Christian in particular,
“ from the completion of the prophe-
“ cies in the Old and New Testament,
“ which relate to the Christian church,
“ especially to the apostacy of Papal
“ Rome: That, in case of any va-
“ cancy in this trust by the decease
“ of any one or more of the above-
“ mentioned Trustees, the place or
“ places shall be filled up, from time
“ to time and as occasion may require,
“ by the surviving Trustees, or Trustee,
“ or by the Executors of the survivor
“ of them: That the Trustees shall
“ appoint the Preacher of Lincoln's-Inn
“ for

x *Extract from the DEED of TRUST,*

*“ for the time being, or some other
“ able Divine of the Church of Eng-
“ land, to preach this Lecture: That
“ the Lecture shall be preached every
“ year in the Chapel of Lincoln’s-Inn
“ (if the Society give leave [b]) and
“ on the following days, viz. the first
“ Sunday after Michaelmas Term, the
“ Sunday next before and the Sunday
“ next after Hilary Term: That the
“ Lecturer shall not preach the said
“ Lecture longer than for the term
“ of FOUR YEARS, and shall not again
“ be nominated to preach the same:
“ And, when the term of four years*

*[b] The Society have given leave that this
Lecture be preached in their Chapel, and on
the days specified.*

“ is

for founding this LECTURE. xi

“ is expired, that the said Lecturer
“ shall print and publish, or cause to
“ be printed and published, all the Ser-
“ mons or Lectures, that shall have been
“ so preached by him.”

CON-

for founding the Institute.
" is expired, that the said Institute
" shall print and publish, or cause to
" be printed and published, all the ser-
" mons or Lectures, that shall hereafter
" be preached by him."

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[1]

S E R M O N I.

False Ideas of PROPHECY.

2 PETER, i. 21.

Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake, as they were moved by the Spirit of God.

THE argument from prophecy, in support of the Christian revelation, would be thought more conclusive, at least would be more distinctly apprehended; if men could be kept from mixing their own prejudices and preconceptions with it.

The general question may be expressed thus—"Whether the predictions in the " Old and New Testament do not appear " to have been so far, and in such sense, " fulfilled, as to afford a reasonable con-

“viction, that they *came not*, as the text
“speaks, *by the will of man, but from the*
“*Spirit of God.*”

In examining this question, the predictions themselves cannot be too diligently studied, or too cautiously applied: But, while this work is carrying on, we are still to suppose, and should not for a moment forget, that they *may* be, what they manifestly claim to be, of divine suggestion; I mean, we are to admit, not the truth indeed, but the possibility, of such suggestion, till we can fairly make it appear that they are of human contrivance, only.

It will not be denied, that the tenour of Scripture, as well as the text, clearly asserts the divine original and direction of the prophecies. A just reasoner on the subject will, therefore, proceed on this supposition, and only try whether it be well founded. He will consider, whether the construction of the prophecies, and the application of them, be such, as may accord

cord to those pretensions; and will not argue against them on other principles, which they do not admit, or suppose. All this is plainly nothing more than what may be expected from a fair inquirer, and what the rules of good reasoning exact from him.

The use of this conduct would be, To prevent, or set aside, all those fancies and imaginations which too frequently mislead inquirers into the evidence of prophecy; which fill their minds with needless perplexities, and disgrace their books with frivolous and impertinent disquisitions. And, because I take it to be of principal moment, that this *use* be perfectly seen and understood, I shall, *first*, apply myself to justify and explain it.

It is true that *prophecy*, in the very idea of that term, at least in the scriptural idea of it, implies the divine agency; and that, exerted not merely in giving the faculty itself, but in directing all its operations.

4. *False Ideas of PROPHECY.*

Yet I know not how it is that, when men address themselves to the study of the prophetic scriptures, they are apt to let this so necessary idea slip out of their minds; and to discourse upon them just as they would or might do, on the supposition that the prophet was left at liberty to dispense this gift in all respects, as he should think proper. No wonder then, that they should misconceive of its character, and entertain very different notions about the exercise of this power from what the Scriptures give them of it. Nay it is no wonder that they should even treat the subject with some scorn, while they judge of it by the rule of human prudence, and not of divine wisdom: for, though they would readily own themselves incapable of pronouncing on the secret counsels of God, if prophecy, in its whole administration, be regarded as proceeding merely from him; yet, from their knowledge of human nature, they would think, and with some reason, they were well able

able to conceive how the spirit of prophecy would be administered, if man had the disposal of this spirit committed to him.

Now it happens, as I said, (by an inexcusable perverseness, or inattention, indeed, yet in fact it so happens,) that, to the consideration of the argument from prophecy, as applied to the proof of the Christian religion, many inquirers bring with them this strange and fatal prejudice; and then their reasonings, or rather conjectures, on the SUBJECT, the END, and the DISPENSATION of prophecy, are only such, as this prejudice may be expected to inspire.

I. Judging for ourselves, and by the light of human investigation only, there might be some ground for supposing, that, if it should please God at any time to confer the gift of prophecy on his favoured servants, they would be solely or chiefly commissioned to unfold the future fortunes of the most conspicuous states and

6 *False Ideas of PROPHECY.*

kingdoms in the world: that so divine a power would embrace, as its peculiar object, the counsels and enterprizes, the successes and triumphs of the most illustrious nations; those especially, which should rise to the summit of empire by generous plans of policy, and by the efforts of public virtue; of *free states*, in a word, such as we know to have flourished in the happier ages of Greece, and such as we still contemplate with admiration in the vast and awful fabric of Consular Rome. This we might think a fit object for the prophetic spirit to present to us; as corresponding in some degree to the sublime character of a prophet; and as most worthy, in our conceptions, of the divine attention and regard.

But how are we surprized to find that this astonishing power, the most signal gift of heaven to mankind, hath, in its immediate application at least, respected, many times, obscure individuals, whose names and memory are only preserved in
one

one barbarous chronicle, hath been chiefly employed, and, as we are ready to express it, thrown away on one single state, or rather family; inconsiderable in the extent of its power or territory; sequestered from the rest of the nations, and hardly known among them [a]; with some mention, perhaps, of greater things, but incidentally touched, as it may seem, and as they chanced to have some connection with the interests of this sordid people!

Was this a stage, on which it might be expected that the God of heaven would

[a] Thus Celsus represents the Jews — μηδὲν πώποτε ἐξιόλογον πράξεσθαι, ἢτ' ἐν λόγῳ, ἢθ' ἐν ἀριθμῷ αὐτὲς ποιεῖν γενημένους. ORIG. contra CELS. l. iv. p. 181. *ed. Spenc. Cantab.* 1677. And in p. 175, he represents it as the highest absurdity in such reptiles to pretend that their insignificant concerns were the objects of divine prediction, and that the supreme Governor of the world, who had so many greater things upon his hands, should be only solicitous, as it were, to keep up a perpetual intercourse with them. See the whole passage, which the philosopher seems to have taken a pleasure to work up with much oratorical amplification.—Julian, too, was much pleased with this foolish objection,

8 *False Ideas of PROPHECY.*

condescend to display the wonders of his prescience; when He kept aloof, as it were, from more august theatres, and would scarcely vouchsafe to have the skirts of his glory seen by the nobler and more distinguished nations of the World?

Such questions as these are sometimes asked. But they are surely asked by those, who consider the prophets, as acting wholly on human views and motives; and not as over-ruled in all their predictions by *the spirit of God*. For it is natural enough for vain man, if left to himself in the exercise of the prophetic power, to turn his view towards such objects as appear to him great, in preference to others; and to estimate that greatness by the lustre of fame, in which they shine out to the observation of mankind. But a moment's reflection may shew the probability, the possibility at least, that *God's thoughts are not as our thoughts*; and that, if the prophet's foresight be under the divine influence, there may be reason enough to direct

direct it towards such scenes and objects, as we might be apt to undervalue or overlook. It is even very conceivable, that, if God be the dispenser of prophecy, and not man, all that seems great and illustrious in human affairs may to his all-judging eye appear small and contemptible [*b*]; and, on the other hand, what we account as nothing, may, for infinite reasons, unknown to us, but so far as he is pleased to discover them, be of that importance as to merit the attention of all his prophets from the foundation of the world.

It is evident, then, that to reason in this manner on the subject of divine prophecy, is to suffer ourselves to be misled by a poor and vulgar prejudice; and to forget, what we should ever have present to us, the claim of God's prophets to speak, not as themselves *will*, but as they are *moved by his Spirit*.

[*b*] Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the dust of the balance. *Isaiah xl. 15.*

II. The

II. The END, or ultimate purpose of prophetic illumination, is another point, on which many persons are apt to entertain strange fancies, and to frame unwarrantable conclusions, when they give themselves leave to argue on the low supposition, before mentioned.

1. It is then hastily surmized that the scriptural prophecies, if any such be acknowledged, could only be designed, like the Pagan oracles, to sooth the impatient mind under its anxiety about future events; to signify beforehand to states or individuals, engaged in high or hazardous undertakings, what the issue of them would be, that so they might suit their conduct to the information of the prophet, and either pursue their purpose with vigour, or expect their impending fate with resignation. For, what other or worthier end, will some say, can heaven propose to itself by these extraordinary communications, than to prepare and qualify such events as it decrees to bring to pass; to animate desponding
virtue,

virtue, on the one hand, or to relieve predestined misery, on the other; to adapt itself, in short, to our necessities by a clear discovery of its will in those many intricate situations, which perplex human prudence, elude human foresight, and, but for this previous admonition, would bear too hard on the natural force, or infirmity of the human mind? Some such idea, as this, was plainly entertained by those of the Pagan philosophers who concluded, *from the existence of a divine power, that there must needs be such a thing as divination* [c]. They thought the attributes of their gods, if any such there were, concerned in giving some notice of futurity to mankind.

2. Others, again, encouraged in this conjectural ingenuity by partial views of scripture, come to persuade themselves that prophecy is an act of *special grace and favour*, not to this or that state, or individuals, indiscriminately, as either may seem to stand in need of it; but to one peculiar and

[c] Si dii sunt, est divinatio.

chosen people, who, on some account or other, had merited this extraordinary distinction.

Self-love seems to have suggested this idea to the antient and modern Jews; and many others, I doubt, are ready enough to suppose with them, that prophecy, under the Mosaic dispensation, had no other reasonable use, or end.

3. Lastly, there are those who erect their thoughts to nobler contemplations, and conclude that this intercourse between heaven and earth can only be carried on with the sublime view of preserving an awful sense of providence in an impious and careless world.

Vanity, or superstition, may they say, has suggested to particular men, or to societies of men, that their personal or civil concerns are of moment enough to be the subject of divine prophecies, vouchsafed merely for their own proper relief or satisfaction. But nothing less than the maintenance of God's supreme authority over his moral creation could

could be an object worthy of his interposing in the affairs of men, in so remarkable a manner. To keep alive in their minds a prevailing sense of their dependance upon him, is, then, the ultimate end of prophecy: and what more suitable (will they perhaps add, when warmed with this moral enthusiasm,) to the best ideas we can form of divine wisdom, than that this celestial light should be afforded to such ages or nations as are most in want of that great and salutary principle?

There is reason to believe, that many of the antient speculatists reasoned thus on the subject of divination. For, as they argued *from the existence of their gods, to the necessity of divination*; so, again, they turned the argument the other way, *and from the reality of divination, inferred the existence and providence of their gods* [d]. In drawing the former conclusion, they shewed themselves to be in the system of those who maintain, that the end of pro-

[d] Si divinatio fit, dii sunt.

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phesy is *the instruction of men in their civil or personal concerns*: when they drew the latter, they seemed to espouse the more enlarged sentiments of such as make the end of prophecy to be, *The instruction of men in the general concerns of religion.*

I omit other instances, that might be given; and concern myself no further with these, than just to observe from them; That the foundation of all such systems is laid in the prejudices of their respective patrons; conjecturing rather what *use* might be made of this faculty, and to what purpose men, according to their different views or capacities, would probably apply it, than regarding it, with due reverence, as directed by the spirit of God. For then they would see, that not one of those ends, nor any other of human conjecture, could be safely relied upon, as being that of prophetic inspiration. Not that all these ends need be rejected as manifestly unworthy of the divine intention; perhaps, each of them, in a certain sense,

sense, and with some proper limitation, might without impiety, be conceived to enter into it. But neither could it be presumed, if none of those ends could have been pointed out, that therefore there was no reasonable end of divine prophecy; nor could it with modesty be affirmed that the noblest of these ends was certainly that, which the wisdom of God proposed chiefly and ultimately to accomplish by it, unless the information had been given by himself.

III. But this folly of commenting on prophecy by the false lights of the imagination is never more conspicuous, than when the DISPENSATION of this gift, I mean the *mode* of its conveyance, comes to exercise the curiosity of presumptuous men.

“ If it be true, will some say, that the Supreme Being hath at any time condescended to enlighten human ignorance by a discovery of future events, these divine notices, whatever the *end* or *subject* of them might

might be, must have been given in terms so precise, and so clearly predictive of the events to which they are applied, that no doubt could remain either about the interpretation or completion of them.

On the contrary, these pretended prophecies are expressed so ambiguously or obscurely, are so involved in metaphor and darkened by hieroglyphics, that no clear and certain sense can be affixed to them, and the sagacity of a second prophet seems wanting to explain the meaning of the first.

Then, again, when we come to verify these predictions by the light of history, the correspondence is so slight many times, and so indeterminate, that none but an easy faith can assure itself, that they have, in a proper sense, been fulfilled. At the least, there is always room for some degree of suspense and hesitation: either the accomplishment fails in some particulars, or other events might be pointed out, to which the prophecy equally corresponds:

so that the result is, a want of that entire and perfect conviction, which prophecy, no doubt, was intended to give, and, when fulfilled, must supply [e].

Indeed, continue these inquirers, if our prophecies had been derived from no higher an original, than that of Pagan oracles, we might well enough have supposed them to be of this stamp. When men had nothing to trust to, in their predictions, but their own ingenuity, they did well to deal in equivocal or enigmatic expression, and might leave it to chance, or to the passions of their votaries, to find an application for their random conjectures. But when the

[e]. These objections were long since urged by Celsus, who speaks of the Jewish and Christian oracles, as *fanatical, uncertain, and obscure*, l. vii. p. 338.—*ἀγνώστα, καὶ πάροιστρα, καὶ πάντη ἄδηλα, ὥν τὸ μὲν γνῶμα ὑδὲὶς ἂν ἔχων ἴεν εὐρεῖν δύναίτο, ἁσαφὴ γὰρ καὶ τὸ μηδέν.* as applicable to other subjects besides those to which they were referred—*τὰς εἰς τὰ περὶ τέττε ἀναφερομένας προφητείας δύνασθαι καὶ ἄλλοις ἱσαρμόζειν πρᾶγμασι.* l. i. p. 39.—*nay, as much more applicable to others, than to Jesus—μυρίοις ἄλλοις ἱσαρμολῆται δύνασθαι πολὺ πιθανώτερον τὰ προφητικά ἢ τῇ Ἰησοῦ.* l. ii. p. 78.

prophet is, what he assumes to be, an interpreter of heaven, he may surely afford to speak plainly, and to deliver nothing to us but what shall appear, with the fullest evidence, to be accomplished in the event."

The invidious comparison, here made, between Scriptural prophecies and Pagan oracles, will be considered in its place. To the general principle, assumed by these inquirers, *That divine prophecy must be delivered with the utmost clearness and perspicuity, and fulfilled with irresistible evidence,* it may be sufficient to reply, as before, That, though these inquirers use the words, *divine prophecy*, they manifestly argue on the supposition of its human original, or at least application. In this latter case, indeed, it is likely enough that the prophet, for his own credit, or for what he might fancy to be the sole end of prophecy, might chuse, if he were entrusted with the knowledge of future events, to predict them with all possible clearness, and

in such sort that obstinacy itself must see and admit the completion of them: but then, on the *former* supposition, that the prophet was only the minister and instrument of the divine counsels, in the high office committed to him, they will do well to answer, at their leisure, the following questions.

“How do they know in what manner, and with what circumstances, it was fit for divine wisdom to dispense a knowledge of futurity to mankind? How can they previously determine the degree of evidence with which a prediction must be either given or fulfilled? What assurance have they, that no reasonable ends could be served by prophecies, expressed with some obscurity, and accomplished in a sense much below what may seem necessary to unavoidable conviction? Can they even pretend, on any clear principles of reason, that very important ends, perhaps the most important, may not be answered by that mode of conveyance, which appears

to them so exceptionable? Can they, in a word, determine before-hand, I do not say with certainty, but with any colour of probability; what *must* be the character of divine prophecy, when they know not the reason, most undoubtedly not *all* the reasons, why it is given, and have even no right to demand, that it should be given at all?"

Till these, and other questions of the like sort, be pertinently answered, it must be in vain to censure the ways of providence, as not corresponding to our imperfect and short-sighted views.

So much for that *capital* prejudice taken from the supposed obscurity of the scriptural prophecies. Of *smaller* scruples and difficulties on this head, there is no end.

Men may ask, for instance, why the instruments employed in conveying these celestial notices to mankind, are frequently so mean and inconsiderable? The subject of a prediction is the downfall of some mighty state, or the fortune of its governments.

ours. Why then is this important revelation intrusted to an obscure priest, or sordid peasant, in preference to the great persons, more immediately concerned in it [f]?

Again; some momentous events have been signified in dreams: why not to persons awake, and in the full possession of their best faculties [g]?

And then, of those dreams, why are they sometimes sent to one man, and the interpretation of them reserved for another [h]?

Why—But I have done with these frivolous interrogatories; which, though press-

[f] *Utrum tandem, per deos atque homines, magis verisimile est, vesanum remigem, aut aliquem nostrum, qui ibi tum eramus, me, Catonem, Varronem, Coponium ipsum, concilia deorum immortalium perspicere potuisse? Cic. Div. l. ii. c. 55.*

[g] *Illud etiam requiro, cur, si deus ista visa nobis providendi causâ dat, non vigilantibus potius dat quam dormientibus? l. ii. c. 61.*

[h] *Jam verò quid opus est circuitione et amfractu, ut sit utendum interpretibus somniorum, potius quam directâ? Ibid.*

ed with all the advantage of Cicero's rhetoric, have really no force against *Pagan divination*; and therefore surely none, against *Scriptural prophecy*; I mean, in the opinion of those who respect it least.

In truth, they who put these questions (arguing, as they must do, on the supposition that prophecy is divinely inspired) cannot excuse their presumption, even to themselves: and they, to whom such questions are proposed, will not, if they be wise, so much as attempt to resolve them. For they have the nature of arguments addressed not only to the *ignorance*, as we say, of the disputant, but to an ignorance clearly *invincible* by all the powers of human reason. Now to arguments of this sort—*I know not* [*i*]*—*is the answer of good sense, as well as of modesty, and, to a just reasoner, more satisfactory by far, than any solution whatever of the difficulty proposed [*k*].

[*i*] Οὐκ οἶδ'. ἰφ' οἷς γὰρ μὴ φρονῶ, σιγᾶν φιλῶ.

Soph. Oedip. Tyran. ver. 577.

[*k*] Quod est enim criminis genus, aut rei esse ali-

Not

Not that reason is to be wholly silenced on the argument of prophecy: for then every species of imposture would be ready to flow in upon us. The *use*, we should make both of that faculty, and of these preliminary considerations on the *subject*, the *end*, and the *dispensation* of prophecy is, briefly, this, To inquire, whether *any* prophecies have been given—in what sense they are reasonably to be interpreted—and how far, and whether in any proper sense, they have been fulfilled: to examine them, in a word, by their own claims, and on the footing of their own pretensions; that is, to argue on the supposition that they *may* be divine, till they can be evidently shewn to be otherwise.

This is clearly to act suitably to our own faculties; to keep within the sphere

cujus ignarum, aut ipsum, quod nescias, sine aliquâ profiteri dissimulatione nescire? aut uter magis videtur irrisione esse dignissimus vobis, qui sibi scientiam nullam tenebræ rei alicujus assumit, an ille, qui retur se ex se apertissimè scire id, quod humanam transfiliat notionem, et quod sit cæcis obscuritatibus involutum?

Arnobius, adv. Gen. l. ii.

24 *False Ideas of PROPHECY,*

of our duty; and to reap the proper benefit, whatever it be, of a sober inquiry into the authority, and character, and accomplishment of the prophetic scriptures.

All the rest is idle cavil, and miserable presumption; equally repugnant to the clearest dictates of right reason, and to that respect which every serious man will think due to the subject, and to himself.

S E R M O N II.

The true Idea of PROPHECY.

R E V. xix. 10.

The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of Prophecy.

IT is very clear in what manner common sense instructs us to prosecute all inquiries into the divine conduct. Wise men *collect*, from what they see done in the system of nature, so far as they are able to collect it, the intention of its author. They will conclude, in like manner, from what they find delivered in the system of revelation, what the views and purposes of the revealer were.

Prophecy, which makes so considerable a part of that system, must, therefore, be its own interpreter. My meaning is, that,
setting

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setting aside all presumptuous imaginations of our own, we are to take our ideas of what prophecy *should* be, from what, in fact, we find it to have been. If it be true (as the Apostle says, and as the thing itself speaks) that *the things of God knoweth no man but the spirit of God* [1], there cannot possibly be any way of acquiring right notions of prophecy, but by attending to what the spirit of prophecy hath revealed of itself. They, who admit the divine original of those scriptures, which attest the reality, and alone, as they suppose, contain the records, of this extraordinary dispensation, are more than absurd, are impious, if they desert this principle. And they, who reject or controvert their claim to such original, cannot, on any other principle, argue pertinently against that dispensation.

In short, believers and unbelievers, whether they would support, or overturn, the system of prophecy, must be equally go-

[1] 1 Cor. ii. 11.

verned by the representation given of it in scripture. The *former* must not presume, on any other grounds, to assert the wisdom and fitness of that system: and the *latter* will then take a reasonable method of discrediting, if by such means they can discredit, the pretensions of it. For, as to vindicate prophecy on any principles but its own, can do it no honour; so, to oppose it on any other, can neither prejudice the cause itself, nor serve any reasonable end of the opposer.

To scripture then we must go for all the information we would have concerning the *use* and *intent* of prophecy: and the text, to look no farther, will clearly reveal this great secret to us.

But, before we proceed to reason from the text, in which, as it is pretended, this discovery is made, it will be necessary to explain its true meaning.

St. John, in this chapter of the Revelations, from which the text is taken, had been shewn the downfall of Babylon, and

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the consequent exaltation of the church, in its closest union with Christ, prefigured under the Jewish idea of a *marriage*. To so delightful a vision, the Angel, in whose presence, and by whose ministry, this scene of glory had been disclosed, subjoins this triumphant admonition—*Write*, says he; *Blessed are they which are called to the marriage of the Lamb. These are the true sayings of God.*

The Apostle, struck with this emphatic address, and contemplating with grateful admiration so joyful a state of things, and the divinity of that fore-sight by which it was predicted, *falls down at the angel's feet to worship him. But he said unto me, See, thou do it not; I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God; for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*

The sense is plainly this: Direct thy acknowledgment for this important discovery, and that religious adoration, which it inspires, to God only who revealed it,
and

and not to *me*, who am but thy fellow-servant in this office of bearing testimony to Jesus: I said *in bearing testimony to Jesus*; for know, that *the spirit of prophecy*, with which I am endowed, and by which I am enabled to foretell these great things, is but, in other words, *the testimony of Jesus*; it has no other use or end, but to do honour to him; the prophet, whether he be angel or man, is only the minister of God to bear witness to his Son; and his commission is ultimately directed to this one purpose of manifesting the glories of his kingdom. In discharging this prophetic office, which thou admirest so much, I am then but the witness of Jesus, and so to be considered by thee in no other light than that of thy fellow-servant.

It is evident from the expression, that the text was intended to give some *special* instruction to the Apostle, whose misguided worship afforded the occasion of it. For, if the design had merely been to enforce the general conclusion—*worship*
God—

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God—the premises need only have been
 —*I am the servant of God, as well as thou*
 —for from these premises it had followed,
 that therefore God, and not the Angel,
 was to be worshiped. But the premises
 are not simply, *I am thy fellow-servant*,
 but *I am the fellow-servant of those who*
have the testimony of Jesus: which clause
 indeed infers the same conclusion, as the
 former; but, as not being necessary to in-
 fer it (for the conclusion had been just
 and complete without it) was clearly added
 to convey a precise idea of prophecy it-
 self, as being wholly subservient to Christ,
 and having no other use or destination,
 under its various forms and in all the di-
 versities of its administration, but to bear
 testimony to him. Therefore the Angel
 says emphatically, in explanation of that
 latter clause,—*For the testimony of Jesus*
is the spirit of prophecy—or, as the sen-
 tence, in our translation, should have run,
 the order of its parts being inverted, *For*
the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.

It

It may not be pretended that no more was meant by the text, than that *the particular* prophecy, here delivered, was in attestation of Jesus: for then it would have been expressed with that limitation. The terms, on the other hand, are absolute and indefinite—*the spirit of prophecy*—whence we cannot but conclude that prophecy, in general, is the subject of the proposition.

We have here, then, a remarkable piece of intelligence conveyed to us (incidentally indeed conveyed, but not therefore the less remarkable) concerning the nature and genius of prophecy. The text is properly a key put into our hands, to open to us the mysteries of that dispensation; which had in view ultimately the person of Christ and the various revolutions of his kingdom—*The spirit of prophecy is, universally, the testimony of Jesus* [m].

[m] Μαρτυρία τοῦ Ἰησοῦ—*the testimony of, or concerning Jesus, not—the testimony given by Jesus.*

The

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The expression, as I have shewn, is so precise as to leave no reasonable doubt of

The *former* appears to be the sense, for the following reasons.

1. The point asserted, is, "That the Angel, who had delivered this illustrious prophecy, was *the fellow-servant of John*, and not of John only, but of *those who have the testimony of Jesus*." The proof is—*for the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus*—i. e. the end of prophecy is to bear testimony, or, to do honour, to Jesus; therefore, I, says the Angel, who am endowed with this prophetic spirit, am but employed, as thou art: who, in thy character of Apostle or Evangelist, hast received the same general commission, namely, to bear testimony, or to do honour, to Jesus. See *Acts x. 42*. We are, therefore, *fellow-servants*, or joint labourers in the same cause. All this is clear and well-reasoned. But, now, take the words—*the testimony of Jesus*—in the sense of—*the testimony given by Jesus*—and how does the Angel's having *the spirit of prophecy*, prove him to be a *fellow-servant of John*? for the reason assigned will then stand thus—*for the spirit of prophecy is the testimony which Jesus gives of himself*. The inference is, that the Angel was a true prophet. Again: how is the Angel proved, in this way, to be *the fellow-servant of those who have the testimony of Jesus*? Why, thus; the Angel had the spirit of prophecy, and prophecy was the gift of Christ; therefore he was the fellow-servant of those, who had the same gift, i. e. who were prophets.

its

its meaning. Yet it may further serve to justify this interpretation, if we reflect, how

Without doubt. But why so strange a way of proving so plain a point? It had been enough to say—I am a prophet, as others are. Still, what was this to St. John? who, in this place, is not sustaining the character of a prophet; for the worship he was inclined to pay the Angel was on account of the Angel's being, what himself was not, a prophet.

Turn it which way you will, the reasoning is frivolous, or inconsequent. I conclude therefore, that not *this*, but the *other* interpretation gives the true sense of—the testimony of Jesus.

2. To speak of prophecy under the idea of a testimony to, or concerning Jesus, is conforming to the true scriptural idea of that gift. Thus we are told that—to him [i. e. to Jesus] give all the prophets witness—τῷ Ἰησοῦ μαρτυροῦνται πάντες οἱ προφῆται, Acts x. 43. Prophecy, therefore, being the thing here spoken of, is rightly called the testimony, or witness to, or concerning Jesus.

3. Lastly, the construction is fully justified, 1. by observing, that the genitive case [as here Ἰησοῦ] is frequently used in scripture, not actively, but passively. See a variety of instances in Mede, p. 626, where he explains διδασκαλίας δαιμονίων: And 2. by referring the reader to the following passage of St. Paul, where the very expression of the text is so used—μὴ ᾗ ἰπαισχυοῦν τὸ μαρτυρεῖν τῷ Κυρίῳ ἡμῶν—clearly, be not ashamed of bearing testimony to our Lord, 2 Tim. i. 8.—and to

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exactly it agrees with all that the Jewish prophets were understood to intend, and what Jesus himself and his apostles assert was intended, by their predictions.

It were endless to enumerate all the prophecies of the Old Testament, which have been supposed to point at Jesus: and the

Rev. i. 9. where the Apostle tells us, he was in the isle of Patmos—*διὰ τὸν λόγον τῷ Θεῷ, καὶ διὰ τὴν μαρτυρίαν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*—on account of his having been faithful in preaching the word of God, and in bearing testimony to Jesus Christ—and still more plainly, if possible, and indubitably, by referring him to Rev. xii. 17. where, speaking of the Dragon, he says, he went in wrath to make war on those, *which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ*—*τοὺς τηροῦντας τὰς ἐντολάς τῷ Θεῷ, καὶ ἔχοντας τὴν μαρτυρίαν τῷ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ*: for these objects of the Dragon's fury are properly, THE WITNESSES, those faithful servants of truth, who suffered for the courageous and persevering testimony, they gave, in evil times, to Jesus Christ, and to his pure religion.

On the whole, there cannot be the least doubt of the interpretation, here given of this famous text. The expression fairly admits this interpretation; and (what the true critic will regard most) the scope of the place, or pertinence of the reasoning, addressed to St. John, admits no other.

contro-

controversy concerning the application of *some* prophecies to him may be thought difficult. But it is very certain that the Jews, before the coming of Christ, gave this construction to their scriptures: they even looked beyond the letter of their sacred books, and conceived *the testimony* of the Messiah to be the soul and end of the commandment. *The spirit of prophecy* was so firmly believed to intend that *testimony*, that the expectation was general of some such person, as Jesus, to appear among them, and at the very time in which he made his appearance. This, I say, is an undoubted *fact*, what account soever may be given of it, and so far evinces that the *principle*, delivered in the text, corresponds entirely to the idea which the fathers entertained of the prophetic spirit.

Next, Jesus himself appeals to the *spirit of prophecy*, as bearing witness to his person and dispensation. *Search the Scriptures*, says he to the Jews, *for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which*

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testify of ME [n]. Two things are observable in these words. 1. If the Jews thought they had *eternal life* in their scriptures, they must needs have understood them in a spiritual sense; for the *letter* of them taught no such thing: and I know not what *other* spiritual sense, that should lead them to the expectation of *eternal life*, they could put on their scriptures, but that prophetic, or typical sense, which respected the Messiah. 2. Jesus here expressly asserts, that their scriptures *testified of him*. How generally they did so, he explained at large in that remarkable conversation with two of his disciples, after his resurrection, when, *beginning at Moses and ALL the prophets, he expounded unto them in ALL the scriptures the things concerning himself [o].*

The *Apostles* of Jesus are frequent and large in the same appeal to the spirit of prophecy. *Those things*, says St. Peter to the Jews, *which God had shewed by the mouth of ALL his prophets, that Christ should*

[n] John v. 39.

[o] Luke xxiv. 27.

suffer,

suffer, he hath so fulfilled [p]. And, again, after quoting the authority of Moses, Yea, and ALL the prophets from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days [q].

St. Paul seems to have composed some entire epistles [r], with the view of shewing that Christ was prefigured in the Law itself, and that He was, in truth, the substance of the whole Jewish dispensation. So thoroughly, according to him, did the spirit of prophecy pervade that system, and so clearly did it bear testimony to Jesus! Whence, in his apology before Agrippa, we find him asserting of the whole Christian doctrine, *that he said none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come [s].*

[p] Acts iii. 18.

[q] Acts iii. 24. See also Acts x. 43. 1 Pet. i. 10.

[r] See especially the Epistles to the *Hebrews*, and *Galatians*.

[s] Acts xxvi. 22. See farther, Acts xxviii. 23. Rom. iii. 21. Eph. ii. 19, &c.

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More citations cannot be necessary on to plain a point. And I bring these to shew, not the truth of the principle itself (which is not now under consideration) but the certainty of the interpretation, here given to the text. For I make it say no more (though it says it indeed more precisely) than the scriptures themselves were *understood* by the Jews to say, and are represented by Jesus and his Apostles, as *actually* saying, when I affirm its sense to be, "That the scope and end of prophecy was the testimony of Jesus."

On this principle, then, we are to regulate all our reasonings on the subject of prophecy. They who maintain, and they who would confute, its pretensions, must equally go on this supposition. If the system of prophecy can be justified, or so far as it can be justified, on these grounds, the defence must be thought solid and satisfactory; because those grounds are not arbitrarily assumed, but are such as that system itself acknowledges. On the contrary,

trary, whatever advantage may be fairly taken of those grounds to discredit prophecy, must needs be allowed, for the same reason.

Again: On the believer's scheme, that prophecy is of divine inspiration, there can be no *presumption* in arguing from the grounds, here supposed, in favour of prophecy. Because, though all conclusions from a principle of human invention, must be hazardous and rash, yet from a principle of divine authority, many sober and just inferences may be drawn. For it is one thing, to discover a principle, and another, to argue justly and cogently from it.

On the other hand, the unbeliever, who regards the whole system of prophecy as of human invention, must yet be allowed to argue pertinently from the same grounds, because they are the proper grounds of that system: his arguments may be rightly formed, though the principle, from which he argues, appear to

him of no authority. The rules of logic will indeed oblige him to argue on that principle; for, otherwise, he combats, not his adversary's position, but a phantom of his own raising.

Having premised thus much concerning the right interpretation of the text, and the important relation it bears to the present subject, I should now proceed to inquire what conclusions naturally and fairly result from it. For from this assumption, that *Jesus is the end of prophecy*, it will, I think, follow very evidently, that the greater part of those objections which make so much noise, and are so confidently urged, on the subject of prophecy, have no force at all in them.

But, before we enter on that task, it may be useful to consider more particularly what the ASSUMED PRINCIPLE itself is, and to pause a while in contemplation of this idea.

The text, as here interpreted, and in full consonance with the tenor of the sacred

cred writings, implies this fact—that *Prophecy* in general (that is, all the prophecies of the Old and New Testament) hath its ultimate accomplishment in the history and dispensation of Jesus.

But now, if we look into those writings, we find, 1. That prophecy is of a prodigious extent; that it commenced from the fall of man, and reaches to the consummation of all things: that, for many ages, it was delivered darkly, to few persons, and with large intervals from the date of one prophecy to that of another; but, at length, became more clear, more frequent, and was uniformly carried on in the line of one people, separated from the rest of the world, among other reasons assigned, for this principally, to be the repository of the divine oracles: that, with some intermission, the spirit of prophecy subsisted among that people, to the coming of Christ; that He himself and his Apostles exercised this power in the most conspicuous manner; and left behind them
many

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many predictions, recorded in the books of the New Testament, which profess to respect very distant events, and even run out to the end of time, or, in St. John's expression, to that period, *when the mystery of God shall be perfected* [1].

2. Further, besides the extent of this prophetic scheme, the dignity of the *Person*, whom it concerns, deserves our consideration. He is described in terms, which excite the most august and magnificent ideas. He is spoken of, indeed, sometimes as being *the seed of the woman*, and as *the son of man*; yet so as being at the same time of more than mortal extraction. He is even represented to us, as being superior to men and angels; as far above all principality and power, above all that is accounted great, whether in heaven or in earth; as the word and wisdom of God; as the eternal Son of the Father; as the heir of all things, by whom he made the

[1] Rev. x. 7.

worlds;

worlds; as the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.

We have no words to denote greater ideas, than these: the mind of man cannot elevate itself to nobler conceptions. Of such transcendent worth and excellence is that Jesus said to be, to whom all the prophets bear witness!

3. Lastly, the declared *purpose*, for which the Messiah, prefigured by so long a train of prophecy, came into the world, corresponds to all the rest of the representation. It was not to deliver an oppressed nation from civil tyranny, or to erect a great civil empire, that is, to atchieve one of those acts, which history accounts most heroic. No: it was not a mighty state, a *victor people*—

“Non res Romanæ perituraque regna—”
that was worthy to enter into the contemplation of this divine person. It was another and far sublimer purpose, which HE came to accomplish; a purpose, in comparison of which, all our policies are
poor

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poor and little, and all the performances of man as nothing. It was to deliver a world from ruin; to abolish sin and death; to purify and immortalize human nature; and thus, in the most exalted sense of the words, to be the Saviour of all men, and the blessing of all nations.

There is no exaggeration in this account. I deliver the undoubted sense, if not always the very words of scripture.

Consider then to what this representation amounts. Let us unite the several parts of it, and bring them to a point. A spirit of prophecy pervading all time—characterizing one person, of the highest dignity—and proclaiming the accomplishment of one purpose, the most beneficent, the most divine, that imagination itself can project—Such is the scriptural delineation, whether we will receive it or no, of that œconomy, which we call Prophetic!

And now then (if we must be reasoning from our ideas of *fit and right*, to the rectitude of the divine conduct) let me ask,
in

in one word, whether, on the supposition that it should ever please the moral Governor of the world to reveal himself by prophecy at all, we can conceive him to do it, in a *manner*, or for *ends*, more worthy of him? Does not the *extent* of the scheme correspond to our best ideas of that infinite Being, to whom all duration is but a point, and to whose view all time is equally present? Is not the *object* of this scheme, the Lamb of God that was slain from the foundation of the world, worthy, in our conceptions, of all the honour that can be reflected upon him by so vast and splendid an œconomy? Is not the *end* of this scheme such as we should think most fit for such a scheme of prophecy to predict, and for so divine a person to accomplish?

You see, every thing here is of a piece : all the parts of this dispensation are astonishingly great, and perfectly harmonize with each other.

We,

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We, who admit the divinity of those records, which represent to us this state of things, cannot but be infinitely affected with it: since, in that case, we only contemplate an undoubted fact, in this representation. And it should further seem that even those, who question that authority of scripture, must, if they be ingenuous, confess themselves *struck* by a representation at once so sublime and consistent. They require, on all occasions, to have reasons of what they call *fitness*, in the divine conduct, pointed out to them: Can they overlook them here, where they are so obvious and so convincing? At least, the credibility of such a scheme, as that of prophecy is in Scripture represented to be, appears not, so far as we have hitherto considered it, to be opposed or lessened in any degree by our *natural* prejudices; by the best notions, I mean, which we can frame on this subject; but is, indeed, much *strengthened* and confirmed by them.

On

On the idea of such a scheme, as is here presented to us, I enlarge no farther, at present, than just to make ONE general observation. It is this: That the argument from prophecy is not to be formed from the consideration of single prophecies, but from all the prophecies taken together, and considered as making one system; in which, from the mutual dependance and connection of its parts, preceding prophecies prepare and illustrate those which follow, and these, again, reflect light on the foregoing: just as, in any philosophical system, that which shews the solidity of it, is the harmony and correspondence of the whole; not the application of it, in particular instances.

Hence, though the evidence be but small, from the completion of any one prophecy, taken separately, yet, that evidence being always something, the amount of the whole evidence, resulting from a great number

number of prophecies, all relative to the same design, may be considerable; like many scattered rays, which, though each be weak in itself, yet, concentrated into one point, shall form a strong light, and strike the sense very powerfully. Still more: this evidence is not simply a growing evidence, but is indeed multiplied upon us, from the number of reflected lights, which the several component parts of such a system reciprocally throw upon each: till, at length, the conviction rise into a high degree of moral certainty.

It hath been said indeed, of this scheme, or way of considering prophecy, *that it is an imaginary scheme, of which there is not the least trace in any of the four Gospels; and that it even contradicts the whole evidence of prophecy, as it was understood and applied by the Apostles and evangelists* [u].

But what, is there no trace of this scheme in the Gospel, when Jesus himself

[u] DR. MIDDLETON'S Works, vol. III. p. 137. London, 1752, 4to.

began at Moses and the prophets, and expounded [to his disciples] in ALL the scriptures the things concerning himself? Is this scheme contradictory to the evidence of prophecy, as understood by the Apostles, when St. Peter argued with the Jews from what God had spoken by the mouth of ALL his prophets, since the world began?

Is not here a series of prophecies, expressly referred to, as running up not only to the times of Moses [*w*], but to the beginning of the world? And is not this series argued from, as constituting one entire system of prophecy, and as affording an evidence distinct from that which arises from the consideration of each prophecy, taken singly and by itself?

But Jesus and his Apostles, usually, *applied the prophecies singly and independently*

[*w*] Though by *Moses*, is here meant, not the prophecies of Moses only, but the *books* of Moses, containing those former prophecies, which, as St. Peter says, had been delivered, *since the world began*.

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on each other, as so many different arguments for the general truth of the Gospel [*].

Could they do *otherwise*, when the occasions offered, in the course of their ministry, to which those prophecies were to be applied? Or, could they do *better*, in their discourses to the people, to whom the argument from single prophecies would be more familiar, than that complicated one, arising from a whole system? Does it follow, because the prophecies were applied singly, that therefore they might not with good reason be applied systematically; or that they may not now be so applied, when we have to do with those, who are capable of entering into this sort of argumentation? Will it be said that, because the moral precepts of the Gospel are delivered singly, there is therefore no such thing as a system of morality, or that the subject may not be treated with propriety, and with advantage too, in that form?

[*] DR. MIDDLETON, p. 139.

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On the whole, the prophecies of the Old and New Testament, having clearly all the *qualities* of what we call a system, that is, consisting of many particulars, dependent on each other, and intimately connected by their reference to a common end, there is no reason why they may not be considered in this light; and there is great reason why they should be so considered, since otherwise, on many occasions, we shall not do justice to the argument itself.

To return then to the text (which implies the existence and use of such a system) and to conclude with it. *The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.* This angelic information presents, at first sight, an idea stupendous indeed, but, on such a subject, suitable enough to our expectations. It offers no violence to the natural sense of the human mind; but, on the contrary, hath every thing in it to engage our belief and veneration.

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Such is the *idea* of Prophecy, contemplated in itself. What *conclusions* (of importance, as we suppose, to the right apprehension and further vindication of prophecy) may be drawn from that idea, will be next considered.

S E R M O N III.

Conclusions from the true Idea of
P R O P H E C Y.

REV. xix. 10.

*The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of
Prophecy.*

WE have seen how precarious all our reasonings on divine prophecy must be, when built on no better grounds than those of human fancy and conjecture. The text supplies us with a principle, as *we* believe, of divine authority; as *all* must confess, of scriptural authority; that is, of the same authority as that on which prophecy itself stands.

This principle has been explained at large. It affirms that *Jesus*, whose person and character and history are sufficiently

known from the books of scripture, is the end and object of the prophetic system, contained in those books.

We are now at liberty to reason from this principle. Whatever conclusions are fairly drawn from it, must to the believer appear, as certain truths; must to the unbeliever appear, as very proper illustrations of that principle.

In general, if difficulties can be removed by pursuing and applying scriptural principles, they are fairly removed: and the removal of every such difficulty, on these grounds, must be a presumption in favour of that system, whether we call it of *Prophecy*, or *Revelation*, which is thus found to carry its own vindication with it.

From the principle of the text may, I think, be deduced, among others, the following conclusions; all of them tending to clear the subject of prophecy, and to obviate some or other of those objections, which prejudiced or hasty reasoners have been disposed to make to it.

I. My

I. My first conclusion is, "That, on the idea of such a scheme of prophecy, as the text supposes, a considerable degree of obscurity may be reasonably expected to attend the *delivery* of the divine predictions."

There are general reasons which shew that prophecy, as such, will most probably be thus delivered. For instance, it has been observed, that, as the completion of prophecy is left, for the most part, to the instrumentality of free agents, if the circumstances of the event were predicted with the utmost precision, either human liberty must be restrained; or human obstinacy *might* be tempted to form, the absurd indeed, but criminal purpose, of counteracting the prediction. On the contrary, by throwing some part of the predicted event into shade, the moral faculties of the agent have their proper play, and the guilt of an intended opposition to the will of heaven is avoided. This reason seems to have its weight: and many others

might still be mentioned. But I argue, at present, from the *particular* principle, under consideration.

An immense scheme of prophecy was ultimately designed to bear testimony to the person and fortunes of Jesus. But Jesus was not himself to come, till what is called the *last age* of the world, nor all the purposes of his coming to be fully accomplished, till the *end* of that age.

Now, whatever reasons might make it fit, in the view of infinite wisdom, to defer the execution of this scheme to so distant a period, may probably be conceived to make it fit, that the *delivery* of it should be proportionably dark and obscure. A certain degree of light, we will say, was to be communicated from the date of the prophecy: but it is very conceivable that the ages nearer the completion of it, might be more immediately concerned in the event predicted; and that, till such time approached, it might be convenient to leave the prediction in a good degree of obscurity.

The

The fact answers to this presumption. Prophecies of very remote events, remote, I mean, from the date of the prediction, are universally the most obscure. As the season advanced for their accomplishment, they are rendered more clear: either fresh prophecies are given, to point out the time, and other circumstances, more determinately; or the completion of some prophecies affords new light for the interpretation of others, that are unfulfilled. Yet neither are we to conceive that those *fresh prophecies*, or this *new light* removes all obscurity: enough is still left to prevent or disappoint the efforts of presumption; and only so much additional clearness is bestowed on the prophecy, as the revealer saw fit to indulge to those who lived nearer the time of its completion.

But this is not all: By looking into that plan of providence, which respects Jesus, and the ends to be accomplished by him, as it is drawn out in the sacred writings, we find a *distinct* reason for the obscurity

rity of the prophecies, relative to that subject.

We there find it to have been in the order of the divine councils, that, between the first dawnings of revelation and the fuller light of the Gospel, an intermediate and very singular œconomy, yet still preparatory to that of Jesus, should be instituted. This œconomy (for reasons, which it is not to our present purpose to deduce, and for some, no doubt, which we should in vain attempt to discover) was to continue for many ages, and *while* it continued, was to be had in honour among that people, for whom it was more immediately designed. But now the genius of those two dispensations, the Jewish, I mean, and the Christian, being wholly different; the one, carnal, and enforced by temporal sanctions only, the other, spiritual, and established on better promises, the prophets, who lived under the former of these dispensations (and the greater part of those, who prophesied of Jesus, lived under it) were

were of course so to predict the future œconomy, as not to disgrace the present. They were to respect the *Law*, even while they announced the *Gospel*, which was, in due time, to supersede it [y].

So much, we will say, was to be discovered as might erect the thoughts of men towards some better scheme of things, hereafter to be introduced; certainly so much, as might sufficiently evince the divine intention in that scheme, when it should actually take place; but not enough to indispose them towards that state of discipline, under the yoke of which they were then held. From this double purpose, would clearly result that character, in the prophecies concerning the new dispensation, which we find impressed upon them; and which St. Peter well describes, when he speaks of them, as dispensing a light indeed, but *a light shining in a dark place*.

Upon the whole, the delivery of prophecy seems well suited to that dispensa-

[y] D. L. Vol. v. p. 218. London, 1765.

tion which it was given to attest. If the object in view had been one single event, to be accomplished all at once, it might perhaps be expected that the prophecies concerning it would have been clear and precise. But, if the scheme of Christianity be what the scriptures represent it to be, a scheme, commencing from the foundation of the world, and unfolding itself by just degrees through a long succession of ages, and to be fully accomplished only at the consummation of all things, *prophecy*, which was given to attend on that scheme, and to furnish a suitable attestation to it, must needs be supposed to adapt itself to the nature of the dispensation; that is, to have different degrees of clearness or obscurity according to its place in the general system; and not to disclose more of it, or in clearer terms, at one period, than might consist with the various ends of wisdom which were to be served by the gradual opening of so vast and intricate a scene.

ANOTHER

ANOTHER circumstance, of affinity with this, is apt to strike us, in the contemplation of the scriptural prophecies. There is reason to believe that more than one sense was purposely inclosed in some of them; and we find, in fact, that the writers of the New Testament give to many of the old prophecies an interpretation very different and remote from that which may be reasonably thought the primary and immediate view of the prophets themselves. This is what Divines call the DOUBLE SENSE of prophecy: by which they mean an accomplishment of it in more events than one; in the same system indeed: but at distant intervals, and under different parts of that system.

Now, as suspicious as this circumstance may appear, at first sight, it will be found, on inquiry, to be exactly suited to that idea of prophecy which the text gives us of it, as being, from the first, and all along, intended to *bear Testimony to Jesus*. For from that idea I conclude again,

II. " That

II. "That prophecies of a *double sense* may well be expected in such a scheme."

And where is the wonder that, if prophecy was given to attest the coming of Jesus and the dispensation to be erected by him, it should occasionally, in every stage of it, respect its main purpose; and, though the immediate object be some other, it should never lose sight of that, in which it was ultimately to find its repose and end?

It hath been before observed, That, between the earlier notices concerning Jesus, and the advent of that great person, it seemed good to infinite wisdom (I speak in terms, suited to the representation of scripture) to institute the intermediate œconomy of the Jewish Law. Among other provisions for the administration of this Law, *prophecy* was one; and, upon its own pretensions, a necessary one; for the government claims to be strictly *theocratical*; and the people, to be governed by it, were to be made sensible, at every step, that it was
so.

10. Therefore the interesting events in their civil history were to be regarded by them, as coming within the cognifance, and lying under the controul, of their divine governour: to which end, a race of men were fucceffively raifed up among them to give them warning of thofe events, and, by this divine foresight of what was feen to be accomplished in their history, to afford a clear conviction, that they were, in fact, under that peculiar government.

Add to this, that the *Law* itfelf, fo wonderfully constructed, was but a part, indeed the rudiments, of one great fcheme; was given, not for its own fake, but to make way for a ftill nobler and more generous institution; was, in truth, a preparatory ftate of difcipline, or *paedagogy*, as St. Paul terms it, to bring the fubjects of it, in due time, to *Chrift* [2].

Jesus then, the object of the earlieft prophecies, was not overlooked in this follow-

[2] Gal. iii. 24.—ὁ νόμος παιδαγωγὸς ἡμῶν γέγονεν ἕως Χριστοῦ—

ing dispensation; which was, indeed, distinct with presages of that divine person. *It gave the shadow of good things to come, but the body was of Christ [a].* The legal prophets, in like manner, while they were

[a] Coloss. ii. 17. Hence, St. Austin affirms roundly, "That, to such as consider the genius of the revealed system, the Old Testament must appear a continued prophecy of the New."—*Vetus Testamentum, rectè sentientibus, PROPHETIA est Novi Testamenti [contr. Faustum, l. xv.]*: and St. Jerom speaks of it as a generally-received maxim; "That it is the manner of sacred scripture, to deliver, beforehand, the truth of futurity, in types"—*bunc esse morem scripturæ sanctæ ut futurorum veritatem præmittat*, in TYPIS [Hieron. T. III. 1127.].—I know, that the antient Fathers, and from them many moderns, have exposed themselves to much and deserved censure, by pursuing this principle too minutely and superstitiously, in their mystical and allegorical comments on the Jewish scriptures. But men of sense will consider, that a principle is not therefore to be rejected, because it has been abused. For instance, that the Passover was instituted with a reference to the sacrifice of Christ, that the paschal Lamb was, in the language of St. Austin, a *prophecy*, or, in that of St. Jerom, a *type*, of the lamb of God; will seem highly credible to one who considers the aptness of the correspondence in two related parts of the same system: But, that the famous Law in Deuteronomy, concerning
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immediately employed, and perhaps believed themselves to be solely employed, in predicting the occurrences of the Jewish state, were at the same time, preluding, as it were, to the person and dispensation of Jesus; the holy spirit, which inspired them, bearing out their expression, and enlarging their conceptions, beyond the worth and size of those objects, which came directly in their view.

the marriage of a brother's widow, was *prophetic*, or *typical* of the duty, incumbent on the ministers of the Gospel, to espouse the widowed church of Christ, is certainly much less clear, and will scarcely be admitted even on the authority of St. Austin.—Hoc ipsum—quod uxorem fratris ad hoc frater jussus est ducere, ut non sibi, sed illi sobolem suscitaret, ejusque vocaret nomine, quod inde nasceretur: quid aliud *in figurâ præmonstrat*, nisi quia unusquisque Evangelii prædicator ita debet in Ecclesiâ laborare, ut defuncto fratri, hoc est Christo, suscitaret semen, qui pro nobis mortuus est, et quod suscitatum fuerit, ejus nomen accipiat? *Contr. Faustum* l. 32.—St. Austin might, perhaps, say for himself, that he had an example of this practice in the mystical comments of St. Paul: it may be so: but an *example*, followed without warrant, in this instance, by the learned Father, and, not improbably, ill understood by him.

There is nothing in this account of *prophecy*, but what falls in with our best ideas of the divine wisdom; intently prosecuting one entire scheme; and directing the constituent parts of it to the general purpose of his providence, at the same time that *each* serves to accomplish its own.

This *double*, or *secondary sense* of prophecy was so far from giving offence to Lord Bacon, that he speaks of it with admiration, as one striking argument of its Divinity. *In sorting the prophecies of scripture with their events* (a work much desired by this wise author, and intended by this Lecture) we must allow, says he, for that *latitude which is agreeable and familiar unto divine prophecies, being of the nature of the author, with whom a thousand years are but as one day; and therefore they are not fulfilled punctually at once, but have springing and germinant accomplishment throughout many ages, though the height, or fulness of them many refer to some one age* [b].

[b] Adv. of Learning, B. II.

But,

But, that we may not mistake, or pervert, this fine observation of our great philosopher, it may be proper to take notice, that the reason of it holds in such prophecies only as respect the several successive parts of one system; which, being intimately connected together, may be supposed to come within the view and contemplation of the same prophecy: whereas, it would be endless, and one sees not on what grounds of reason we are authorized, to look out for the accomplishment of prophecy in any casual unrelated events of general history. The Scripture speaks of prophecy, as respecting Jesus, that is, as being one connected scheme of providence, of which the Jewish dispensation makes a part: so that here we are led to expect that *springing and germinant accomplishment*, which is mentioned. But had the Jewish Law been complete in itself, and totally unrelated to the Christian, the general principle—*that a thousand years are with God but as one day*—would no more justify

us in extending a Jewish prophecy to Christian events, because perhaps it was eminently fulfilled in them, than it would justify us in extending it to any other signally corresponding events whatsoever. It is only when the prophet hath one uniform connected design before him, that we are authorised to use this latitude of interpretation. For then the prophetic spirit naturally runs along the several parts of *such* design, and unites the remotest events with the nearest: the style of the prophet, in the mean time, so adapting itself to this double prospect, as to paint the near and subordinate event in terms that *emphatically* represent the distant and more considerable.

So that, with this explanation, nothing can be more just or philosophical, than the idea which Lord Bacon suggests of divine prophecy.

The great scheme of Redemption, we are now considering, being the only scheme in the plan of providence, which, as far as

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we know, hath been prepared and dignified by a continued system of prophecy, at least this being the only scheme to which we have seen a prophetic system applied, men do not so readily apprehend the doctrine of *double senses* in prophecy, as they would do, if they saw it exemplified in other cases. But what the history of mankind does not supply, we may represent to ourselves by many obvious suppositions; which cannot justify, indeed, such a scheme of things, but may facilitate the conception of it.

Suppose, for instance, that it had been the purpose of the Deity (as it unquestionably was) to erect the FREE GOVERNMENT of antient Rome; and that, from the time of Æneas' landing in Italy, he had given prophetic intimations of this purpose. Suppose, further, that he had seen fit, for the better discipline of his favoured people, to place them, for a season, under the *yoke* of the Regal government; and that, during that state of things, he had instructed his

prophets to foretell the wars and other occurrences which should distinguish that period of their history.—Here would be a case somewhat similar to that of the Jews under their theocratic regimen: not exactly indeed, because prophecy, as we have seen, was essential to the Jewish polity, but had nothing to do with the regal, or any other polity of the Romans. But allow for this difference, and suppose that, for some reason or other, the spirit of prophecy was indulged to this people, under their *kings*, as it was to the Jews, under their *theocracy*: and that it was *primarily* employed in the same way, that is, in predicting their various fortunes under that regimen: Suppose, I say, all this, and would it surprize us to find that their prophets, in dilating on this part of their scheme, should, in a *secondary* sense, predict the future and more splendid part of it? That, having the whole equally presented to their view, they should anticipate the coming glories of their *free* state, even in a prophecy which directly concerned

cerned their *regal*, and much humbler successes? That, in commenting on their petty victories over the Sabins and Latins, they should drop some hints that pointed at their African and Asiatic triumphs; or, in tracing the shadow of freedom they enjoyed under the best of their kings, they should let fall some strokes, that more expressly designed the substantial liberty of their equal republic: the *end*, as we suppose, and completion of that scheme, for the sake of which the prophetic power itself had been communicated to them? Still more: supposing we had such prophecies now in our hands, and that we found them applicable indeed in a general way to the former parts of their history, but frequently more expressive of events in the latter, should we doubt of their being prophecies in a *double sense*, or should we think it strange that two successive and dependent dispensations in the same connected scheme should be, at once, the object of the same predictions? And lastly, to put an end to

these questions, could there seem to be equal reason for applying these predictions to such events as might possibly correspond to them in some *other* history, the Græcian, for instance, as for applying them to similar events in the *Roman* history?

Let me just observe further, that, from what hath been said under these two articles, we may clearly discern the difference between *Pagan oracles*, and *Scriptural prophecies*. Both have been termed obscure and ambiguous; and an invidious parallel hath been made, or insinuated, between them [c]. The Pagan oracles were indeed *obscure*, sometimes to a degree that no reasonable sense could be made of them: they were also *ambiguous*, in the worst sense; I mean, so as to admit contrary interpretations. The scriptural prophecies we own to be *obscure*, to a certain degree: and we may call them, too, *ambiguous*; because they contained two, consistent, indeed, but

[c] Dr. MIDDLETON, Works, vol. iii. p. 177. London, 1752, 4to.

different

different meanings. But here is the distinction, I would point out to you. The obscurity and ambiguity of the Pagan oracles had no necessary, or reasonable cause in the subject, on which they turned: the obscurity and ambiguity of the scriptural prophecies have an evident reason in the system, to which they belong. As the Pagan predictions had near and single events for their object, the fate perhaps of some depending war, or the success of some council, then in agitation, they might have been clearly and precisely delivered; and in fact we find that such of the Jewish predictions as foretold events of that sort and character, were so delivered: but, the scriptural prophecies under consideration respecting one immense scheme of providence, it might be expedient that the remoter parts should be obscurely revealed; as it was surely natural that the connected parts of such a scheme should be shewn together.

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We see then what force there is in that question, which is asked with so much confidence—"Is it possible, that the same character can be due to the Jewish prophecies, which the wise and virtuous in the heathen world considered as an argument of fraud and falsehood, in the Pythian prophecies [d]?"

First, we say, the character is *not* entirely the same in both: and, *secondly*, that, so far as it *is* the same, that character is very becoming in the Jewish, but utterly absurd in the Pythian prophecies. What was owing to fraud or ignorance in the Pagan Diviner, is reasonably ascribed to the depth and height of that wisdom, which informed the Jewish Prophet [e].

To proceed with our subject. It further appears,

III. On the grounds of the text, we now stand upon, "to be very conceivable and credible that the line of prophecy should run

[d] Dr. MIDDLETON, vol. iii, p. 177.

[e] See further on this subject, D. L. vol. v. p. 290. chiefly

chiefly in one family and people, as we are informed it did, and that the other nations of the earth should be no further the *immediate* objects of it, than as they chanced to be connected with that people."

Prophecy, in the ideas of scripture, was not ultimately given for the private use of this or that nation, nor yet for the nobler and more general purpose of proclaiming the superintending providence of the Deity (an awful truth, which men might collect for themselves from the established constitution of nature) but *simply* to evidence the truth of the Christian revelation. It was *therefore* confined to one nation, purposely set apart to preserve and attest the oracles of God; and to exhibit, in their public records and whole history, the proofs and credentials of an amazing dispensation, which God had decreed to accomplish in Christ Jesus [f].

[f] Quand UN SEUL HOMME auroit fait un livre des prédictions de Jesus Christ pour le tems et pour la maniere, et que Jesus Christ seroit venu conformément à ces propheties, ce seroit une force infinie. Mais il
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This conclusion, I say, seems naturally and fairly drawn from the great principle, that *the spirit of prophecy was the testimony of Jesus*, because the means appear to be well suited and proportioned to the end. The *Testimony* thought fit to be given, was not one or two prophecies only, but a *scheme* of prophecy, gradually prepared and continued through a large tract of time. But how could such a scheme be executed, or rather how could it clearly be seen, that there was such a scheme in view, if some *one* people had not been made the repository, and, in part, the instrument of the divine counsels, in regard to Jesus; some *one* people, I say, among whom we might trace

y a bien plus ici. C'est une suite d'hommes durant quatre mille ans, qui constamment et sans variation viennent l'un ensuite de l'autre, prédire ce même événement. C'est un peuple tout entier qui l'annonce, et qui subsiste pendant quatre mille années, pour rendre en corps témoignage des assurances qu'ils en ont, et dont ils ne peuvent être détournés par quelques menaces et quelque persécution qu'on leur fasse: ceci est tout autrement considérable. Pascal.

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the several parts of such a scheme, and observe the dependance they had on each other; that so the *idea*, of what we call a scheme, might be duly impressed upon us?

For, had the notices concerning the Redeemer been dispersed indifferently among *all* nations, where had been that uncorrupt and unsuspected testimony, that continuity of evidence, that unbroken chain of prediction, all tending, by just degrees, to the same point, which we now contemplate with wonder in the Jewish scriptures?

It is not then that the rest of the world was overlooked [g] in the plan of God's providence, but that he saw fit to employ the ministry of *one* people: this last, I say, and not the other, is the reason why the divine communications concerning Christ were appropriated to the Jews.

Yes, but "some one of the *greater* nations had better been intrusted with that charge." This circumstance, I allow, might

[g] See the passage before referred to in Sermon I.
p. 7.

have struck a superficial observer more: but could the integrity of the prophetic scheme have been more discernible amidst the multiform and infinitely involved transactions of a mighty people, than in the simpler story of this small Jewish family; or would the hand or work of God, who loves to manifest himself by weak instruments, have been more conspicuous in that designation?

On the whole, I forget not, with what awful diffidence it becomes us to reason on such subjects. But the *fact* being, that *one*, in preference to other nations, had the honour of conveying the prophetic admonitions concerning Jesus, it may be allowable to inquire, with modesty, into the reasons of that appointment; and the *end* of prophecy being clearly assigned in sacred scripture, such reasons will not be hastily rejected, as obviously present themselves to an inquirer from the *consideration* of that end.

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The benefits of prophecy, though conveyed by one nation, would finally redound to all; and the more *effectually*, we have seen, for being conveyed by one nation. May we not conclude then (having the *fact*, as I said, to reason upon) that, to obtain such purpose, it was fit to select a *peculiar people*? And, if thus much be acknowledged, it will hardly be thought a question of much moment, though no answer could be given to it, why the *Jews* had that exclusive privilege conferred upon them.

It is true, a great scheme of prophecy was once revealed to a Gentile King [b]; but a King, connected with the Jews, and who had a Jewish prophet for his interpreter. It is, besides, observable of that prophetic scheme, that it laid open the future fortunes of four great empires; but all of them instruments in the hand of God to carry on his designs, on the Jewish people first, but ultimately, with regard to Jesus. For it hath been remarked with

[[b] Daniel, c. ii.

equal truth and penetration, that Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the four kingdoms was designed, as a sort of *prophetic chronology*, to point out, by a series of successive empires, the beginning and end of Christ's spiritual Kingdom. So that the reason, why those four empires only were distinguished by the spirit of prophecy, was not because they were greater than all others, but simply because the course of their history led, in a regular and direct succession, to the times and reign of Christ [i].

[i] Est autem Quaternio iste regnorum Danielis (quod imprimis observari velim) CHRONOLOGIA QUÆDAM PROPHETICA, non tam annorum quàm regnorum intervallis distincta, ubi regnorum in præcipuâ orbis terrarum parte, simul ecclesiam et populum Dei complexâ, sibi invicem succedentium serie, monstratur tempus quo Christi regnum à tot seculis promissum et primum inchoandum sit, idemque demum certis temporibus consummandum.

—Ex his, quæ dicta sunt, ratio elucet, quare, ex omnibus mundi regnis, quatuor hæc sola selegit Spiritus sanctus, quorum fata tam insigni ornaret prophetiâ; nempe quia ex his solis inter omnia mundi regna po-

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We see then, on the principle, *that prophecy was given for the sake of Jesus only*, that no presumption lies against the truth of it, on account of its respecting chiefly one people, how inconsiderable soever in itself, or from its silence in regard to some of the largest and most flourishing kingdoms that have appeared in the world.

IV. Lastly (for I now hasten to an end of this discourse) I infer from the same principle, “That, if, even after a mature consideration of the prophecies, and of the events, in which they are taken to be fulfilled, there should, after all, be some cloud remaining on this subject, which with all our wit or pains we cannot wholly remove, X

riodus temporum ejusmodi contexi potuit, qua rectâ ferie et ordinatâ successione perduceret ad tempora et momenta regni Christi. Non verò quia nulla istis paria imperia, forsan et aliquibus majora, per omnia secula orbis visurus esset. Nam neque Saracenorum olim, neque hodie Turcarum, neque Tartarorum regna ditionis amplitudine Persico aut Græco, puto nec Assyrio, quicquam concedunt; imò, ni fallor, excedunt.

MEDE's Works, B. III. p. 712. Lond. 1672!

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this state of things would afford no objection to prophecy, because it is indeed no other than we might reasonably expect."

For, 1. If Jesus be the end of prophecy, the same reasons that made it fit to deliver some predictions darkly, will further account to us for some degree of obscurity in the application of them to their corresponding events.

I say—will *account* to us for such obscurity—for, whatever those *reasons* were, they could not have taken effect, but by the intervention of such *means*, as must darken in some degree, the application of a prophecy, even after the accomplishment of it; unless we say, that an object can be seen as distinctly through a *veil*, as without one. For instance; *figurative language* is the chief of those means, by which it pleased the inspirer to throw a shade on prophecies, unfulfilled; but figurative language, from the nature of it, is not so precise and clear, as *literal expression*, even when the
event

event prefigured has lent its aid to illustrate and explain that language.

If then it was *fit* that some prophecies concerning Jesus should be *delivered* obscurely, it cannot be supposed that such prophecies, when they come to be *applied*, will acquire a full and absolute perspicuity [*k*].

2. If the dispensation of Jesus be the main subject of the prophecies, then may some of them be still impenetrable to us, because the various fortunes of that dispensation are not yet perfectly disclosed, and so some of them may not hitherto have been fulfilled. But the completion of a prophecy is that which gives the

[*k*] To this purpose the late learned and ingenious author of the *Discourses on Prophecy* — “A figurative and dark description of a future event will be figurative and dark still, when the event happens.” And again — “No event can make a figurative or metaphorical expression to be a plain or literal one.” Bishop Sherlock, Disc. II. p. 32 and 36, London, 1749.

utmost degree of clearness, of which it is capable.

3. But lastly and chiefly, if the end and use of prophecy be to attest the truth of Christianity, then may we be sure that such attestation will not carry with it the utmost degree of evidence. For Christianity is plainly a state of discipline and probation: calculated to improve our moral nature, by giving scope and exercise to our moral faculties. So that, though the evidence for it be *real* evidence, and on the whole *sufficient* evidence, yet neither can we expect it to be of that sort which should compel our assent. Something must be left to quicken our attention, to excite our industry, and to try the natural ingenuity of the human mind.

Had the purpose of prophecy been to shew, merely, that a predicted event was foreseen, then the end had been best answered by throwing all possible evidence into the completion. But its concern being to shew this to such only as should
be

be disposed to admit a reasonable degree of evidence, it was not necessary, or rather it was plainly not fit, that the completion should be seen in that strong and irresistible light [1].

For all the reasons, now given (and doubtless, for many more) it was to be expected, that prophecy would not be one cloudless emanation of light and glory. If it be clear enough to serve the ends, for which it was designed; if through all its obscurities, we be able to trace the hand and intention of its divine author; what more would we have? How improvidently, indeed, do we ask more of that great Being, who, for the sake of the *natural* world, *clothes the heavens with blackness* [Is. 1. 3.]; and in equal mercy to the *moral* world, veils his nature and providence *in thick clouds, and makes darkness his pavilion* [Ps. xviii. 11]?

[1] Le dessein de Dieu est plus de perfectionner la volonté, que l'esprit. Or, la clarté parfaite ne serviroit qu'à l'esprit, et nuiroit à la volonté. Pascal.

TO THESE deductions from the text, more might be added. For I believe it will be found that if the *end* of prophecy, as here delivered, be steddily kept in view and diligently pursued, it will go a great way towards leading us to a prosperous issue in most of those inquiries, which are thought to perplex this subject. But I mean to reason from it no farther than just to shew in the way of specimen, the method in which it becomes us to speculate on the prophetic system. We are not to imagine principles, at pleasure, and then apply them to that system. But we are, first, to find out what the principles are, on which prophecy is founded, and by which it claims to be tried; and then to see whether they will *hold*, that is, whether they will aptly and properly apply to the particulars, of which it is compounded. If they will, the system itself is thus far clearly justified. All that remains is to compare the prophecies with their corresponding events, in order to assure ourselves that

that there is real evidence of their completion.

The use of this method has been shewn in four capital instances. It is objected to the scriptural prophecies, *that they are obscure—that they abound in double senses—that they were delivered to one people—that, after all, there is sometimes difficulty in making out the completion*—all of them, it is said, very suspicious circumstances; and which rather indicate a scheme of human contrivance, than of divine inspiration.

To these objections it is replied, that, from the very idea which the scriptures themselves give of prophecy, these circumstances must needs be found in it; and further still, that these circumstances, when fairly considered, do honour to that idea: for that the obscurity, complained of, results, *from the immensity of the scheme*—the double senses, *from the intimate connection of its parts*—the partial and confined delivery, *from the wisdom and necessity of selecting a peculiar people to be the vehicle and*

repository of the sacred oracles—And lastly, the incomplete evidence, from the nature of the subject, and from the moral genius of that dispensation, to which the scheme of prophecy itself belongs.

In conclusion, it is now seen to what purpose these preliminary discourses serve, and in what method they have been conducted.

The FIRST, shewed the vanity and folly of reasoning on the subject of scriptural prophecy from our preconceived fancies and arbitrary assumptions. The SECOND, shewed the only true way of reasoning upon it to be from scriptural principles, and then opened and explained *one* such principle. In this LAST, I have shewn that, by prosecuting this way of reasoning from the principle assigned, some of the more specious objections to the scriptural prophecies are easily obviated.

Taken together, these three discourses serve to illustrate the *general* idea of prophecy, considered as one great scheme of
testimony

testimony to the religion of Jesus; and consequently open a way for the fair and equitable consideration of *particular* prophecies, the more immediate subject of this Lecture.

SER:

S E R M O N IV,

The general Argument from
P R O P H E C Y.

JOHN xiii. 19.

*Now I tell you before it come, that when it is
come to pass, ye may believe, that I am He.*

IT hath been concluded (not on the
slight grounds of hypothesis, but on
the express authority of scripture), that pro-
phesy was given TO ATTEST THE MISSION
OF JESUS: to afford a reasonable evidence,
that the scheme of redemption, of which he
was the great instrument and minister, was,
in truth, of divine appointment; and was
carried on under the immediate cognizance
and direction of the Supreme Being, whose
prerogative it is to see through all time, and
to

The general Argument from PROPHECY. 91

to call those things, which be not, as though they were [a].

Our next inquiry will be, how the prophetic scriptures *serve* to that end, and what that *evidence* is (I mean, taking for granted, not the truth of the prophetic scheme itself, but the truth of the *representation*, given of it in scripture) which is thus administered to us by the light of prophecy.

I. The text refers to a particular prophecy of our Lord, concerning the treachery of Judas; of which, says he to his disciples, *I now tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am He*: that is, "I add this, to the other predictions concerning myself; that, when ye see it fulfilled, as it soon will be, ye may be the more convinced of my being the person, I assume to be, the *Messias foretold*."

[a] Rom. iv. 17.

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The information, here given, was perhaps intended by our Lord to serve a particular purpose, To prevent, we will say, the offence, which the disciples might have taken at the circumstance of his being betrayed by one of them, if they had not, previously, been admonished of it. But the reason of the thing shews, that the *use*, which the disciples are directed to make of this prophecy, was the *general* use of the prophecies concerning Jesus. The completion was to verify the prediction, in all cases; and to convince the world, That HE was the Messiah, in whom such things should be seen to be accomplished, as had been expressly foretold [*b*].

Indeed prophecies, unaccomplished, may have their use; that is, they may serve to raise a general expectation of a predicted *event* in the minds of those, who, for other reasons, regard the *person* predicting it, in

[*b*] Ταῦτα ὁ Θεὸς προεμήνυσε διὰ τῷ προφητικῷ πνεύματι μέλλειν γίνεσθαι, ἵν', ὅταν γένηται, μὴ ἀπιστηθῇ, ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ προσεῖνθαι πιστευθῇ.

J. MARTYR, Apol. I. c. 74.

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the light of a true prophet. And such might be one, a *subordinate*, use of the prophecies concerning Jesus: but they could not be applied to the *proof* of his pretensions, till they were seen to be fulfilled. Nor can they be so applied even then, unless the things predicted be, confessedly, beyond the reach of human foresight.

Under these conditions, the argument is clear and easy, and will lie thus.—“A great variety of distant, or, at least, future events, inscrutable to human sagacity, and respecting one person (whom we will call, Messiah) have been by different men, and at different times, predicted. These events have accordingly come to pass, in the history and fortunes of one person; in such sort, that each is seen to be, in a proper sense, fulfilled in him, and all together in no other person whatsoever: Therefore the prediction of these events was divinely inspired: or (which comes to the same thing) therefore the person, claiming under these
predic-

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predictions to be the Messiah, or person foretold, hath his claims confirmed and justified by the highest authority, that of God himself."

Such is the argument from prophecy: and on this foundation, Jesus assumes to be the MESSIAH; and his religion, to be DIVINE.

II. Let us now see, what the amount of that *evidence* is, which results from this kind of proof.

Careless talkers may say, and sometimes think, "that prophecy is but an art of conjecturing shrewdly; that the sagacity of one man is seen to be vastly superior to that of another; that, in some men, the natural faculty may be so improved by experience, as to look like *divination*; and that no precise bounds can be set to its powers." Light or sceptical minds may, I say, amuse themselves with such fancies: but serious men will readily acknowledge, That many future events, especially, if *remote*,
or

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or extraordinary [c], or described with some degree of particularity, are not within the ability of the human mind to predict. And, to cut off all occasion of cavil, let it be owned, that the argument under consideration is, or ought to be, drawn from the completion of prophecies, so qualified.

To evade the force, which this argument apparently carries with it, it must then be said, That the completion of any particular prophecy, alledged, was fortuitous, or, what we call, a *lucky hit*.

[c] Soerates foretold that he should *dye within three days*: and the event followed.—*Est apud Platonem Soerates, cum esset in custodiâ publicâ, dicens Critoni suo familiari, sibi post tertium diem esse moriendum—quod, ut est dictum, sic scribitur contigisse.* [Cic. de Div. l. i. c. 25.] Jesus foretold that he should suffer death by *erucifixion*. [John iii. 14. viii. 28. xii. 32.] He, likewise, foretold that he should *rise from the dead*, within *three days* after his *erucifixion*. [John ii. 19. Matth. xii. 39, 40.] —The *first* of these predictions might be a sagacious conjecture. Can it be said of such, as the *two last*,

Augurium, ratio est, et conjectura futuri?

Ovid. Trist. l. I. viii. 51.

“Coin-

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“Coincidencies of this sort, we may be told, are very frequent. In the ceaseless revolution of human affairs, some event or other will be turning up, which may give a countenance to the wildest and most hazardous conjecture. Hence it is, that every groundless fear, every dream, almost, has the appearance of being realized by some corresponding accident; which will not be long in occurring to those, who are upon the watch to make such discoveries. Upon these grounds, the superstition of *omens* hath, at all times, been able to sustain itself; and to acquire a degree of credit, even with wise men. We see, then, that *chance*, in a good degree, supplies the place of inspiration: and that He, who sets up for a Prophet, is likely to drive a safe, as well as gainful trade; especially, if he have but the discretion not to deal too freely in precise descriptions of *times*, and *persons* [*d*]:

[*d*] Hoc si est in libris, in *quem hominem*, et in *quod tempus* est? Callidè enim, qui illa composuit, perfecit, ut, quodcunque accidisset, prædictum videretur, *hominum et temporum definitione sublatâ* — said, in discredit of
a con-

a consideration, of great moment to the men of this craft [e]; and which hath not been overlooked by those, whom we account *true* prophets."

Such libertine reflections, as these, thrown out with an air of negligent ridicule, have too often the effect intended by them. At the same time, they disgust sober men, and are thought too light and trivial to deserve a confutation. But, because I take these suggestions, with whatever levity, or dissingenuity, they may be made, to contain the whole, or at least, the chief strength of the infidel cause, on this subject, I shall not decline to give them a very serious answer.

IT IS TRUE, no doubt, what is here alledged, That the conjectures of fanciful

the Sibylline oracles [*De Div.* l. ii. p. 295. fol. Lutet. 1565]: how far applicable to the scriptural prophecies, will be seen in its place.

[e] Διὰ τὸ ὅλως εἶναι ἀμάχημα ἑλαττον, διὰ τῶν γειῶν τῷ πράγματι λέγουν οἱ μάντις. And again—οἱ χρησμολόγοι, ὃ προσορίζονται ποτε. Aristot. Rhet. l. iii. c. v.

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or designing men, whether grounded on casual signs, or delivered in the direct way of prophecy, have been frequently verified in the events: that is, such events have actually come to pass, in the sense put upon the *sign*, when it was observed, and in the literal sense of the *prophecy*, as delivered. History and common life, it is agreed, abound in such instances [*f*]: and I shall even make no scruple to produce *one* of each sort; as much, at least, to the purpose of these objectors, as any of those, which they have produced for themselves.

Nothing is more famous in the annals of antient Rome, than the story of Romulus, and his TWELVE VULTURES; an *omen* this, on which the auspicious name of the rising city, and the fortune of its founder,

[*f*] Permultorum exemplorum et nostra plena est respublica, et omnia regna, omnesque populi, cunctæque gentes, augurum prædictis multa incredibiliter vera cecidisse. Cic. de Leg. l. ii. p. 337.

were,

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were, at once, established [g]. What further construction was then put on this prodigy, doth not appear : but, as the science of augury advanced in succeeding times, a very momentous and striking prophecy was grounded upon it. For we have it affirmed [b], on the high authority of M. T. VARRO, that Vettius Valens, an augur of distinguished name in those days,

[g] Certabant, urbem Romam, Remoramne vocarent
Omnibu' cura viris, uter esset induperator.

- - - - -
Cedunt de cœlo ter quatuor corpora sancta
Avium, præpetibus sese, pulchrisque locis dant.
Conspicit inde sibi data Romulus esse priora,
Auspicio regni stabilita scamna solumque.

Cic. de Div. l.i. c. 48.

[b] Quot sæcula urbi Romæ debeantur, dicere meum non est : sed, quid apud Varronem legerim, non tacebo. Qui libro Antiquitatum duodevicesimo ait, fuisse Vettium Romæ in augurio non ignobilem, ingenio magno, cuius docto in disceptando parem ; eum se audisse dicentem : Si ita esset, ut traderent historici, de Romuli urbis condendæ auguriis, ac *duodecim vulturbus* ; quoniam cxx annos incolumis præteriiisset populus Romanus, ad *mille et ducentos* perventurum.

CENSORINUS de die natali, c. xvii. p. 97.

Cantab. 1695.

H 2

took

took occasion from this circumstance (and in the hearing of Varro himself) to fix the duration of the Roman empire. The TWELVE VULTURES, he said, which appeared to Romulus, *portended*, that the sovereignty of that state and city, whose foundations he was then laying, should continue for the space of TWELVE HUNDRED YEARS. It is of no moment to inquire, on what principles of his art the learned augur proceeded, in this calculation. The TRUTH is, that the event corresponded, in a surprising manner, to the conjecture; and that the *majesty* of the western empire (of which Rome was the capital) *did*, indeed, expire under the merciless hands of the Goths, about the time limited by this augural prophet.

It should, further, be observed that this prediction was of such credit and notoriety, as to take the attention of the later Romans themselves [*i*], who looked with anxiety for

[*i*] Hence Sidonius, in personating the city of Rome, makes her ask —

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the accomplishment of it: and that it was delivered by Valens, at least *five hundred years* before the event; when there was not the least appearance, that this catastrophe would befall, what was called, the ETERNAL CITY, within that period.

THIS is an instance of divination from *augury*. The OTHER, I am about to give, is a *prophecy*, in full form; respecting a still more important subject, and equally accomplished in the event. A poet, in the ideas of paganism, was a prophet, too. And Seneca [k] hath left us, in proof of the inspiration to which, in his double ca-

Quid, rogo, *bis feno mihi vulture* Thuscus aruspex
Portendit?

Sidon. Carm. vii. 55.

And again, addressing himself to the same city,

Jam propè fata tui *bissenas vulturis alas*.

Complebant (scis namque tuos, scis, *Roma*, labores.)

Ib. ver. 358.

And, before him, Claudian, to the same purpose —

Tunc reputant annos, *interceptoque volatu*

Vulturis, incidunt properatis sæcula metis.

B. G. ver. 262.

[k] Medea, ver. 374.

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capacity, he might pretend, the following oracle:

— venient annis
Secula feris, quibus Oceanus
Vincula rerum laxet, et ingens
Pateat tellus, Tiphysque novos
Detegat orbes; nec sit terris
Ultima Thule.

This prediction was made in the reign of Nero; and, for more than *fourteen hundred* years, might only pass for one of those sallies of imagination, in which poetry so much delights. But, when, at length, in the close of the *fifteenth* century, the discoveries of Columbus had realized this vision: when that enterprizing navigator had forced the barriers of the vast Atlantic ocean; had *loosened*, what the poet calls, *the chain of things*; and in these *later ages* [1], as was expressly signified, had set at liberty an immense continent, shut up before in surrounding seas from the commerce and acquaintance of our world;

[1] *Annis feris.*

when

when this event, I say, so important and so unexpected, came to pass, it might almost surprize one into the belief, that the prediction was something more than a poetical fancy; and that Heaven had, indeed, revealed to *one* favoured Spaniard, what it had decreed, in due time, to accomplish by *another*.

THESE two instances of casual conjecture, converted by time and accident into prophecies, I shall take for granted, are as remarkable, as any other that can be alledged. Cicero, in his first book of *Divinations* where he laboured to assert the reality of such a power in the pagan world, was able to produce nothing equal, or comparable to them. We have the fullest evidence, that these two predictions were delivered by the persons, to whom they are ascribed; and in the time, in which they are said to have been delivered, that is, many hundred years before the event. They, both of them, respect events of the greatest dignity and importance: one of

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them,

them, the downfall of the *mightiest empire*, that hath hitherto subsisted on the face of the earth; and the other, the discovery of a *new world*. Both, express the *time*, when these extraordinary events were to happen: the *latter*, by a general description, indeed, yet not more general, than is frequent in the scriptural prophets; but the *former*, in the most precise and limited terms. In a word, both these predictions are authentic, important, circumstantial: they foretell events, which no human sagacity could have foreseen; and they have been strictly and properly fulfilled.

Now, if such coincidences, as these, do not infer divine inspiration; if, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, it must still be allowed (as it will, on all sides) that they were simply *fortuitous*, or what we call the effects of hazard and pure chance, by what characters shall we distinguish genuine, from pretended, prophecies; or in what way shall it be discovered, that the scriptural prophets spake by the
spirit

spirit of *God*, when these pagan diviners could thus prophecy, by their *own* spirit?

To this objection, put with all the force which I am able to give to it, I reply directly, That the distinction, so importunately demanded, may very easily and clearly be assigned.

If *one or two* such prophecies, *only*, had occurred in our scriptures; if even *several* such had occurred in the whole extent of those writings, and in the large compass of time they take up, without descending to a greater detail than is expressed in these pagan oracles; nay, if *a greater number still* of supposed predictions, thus generally delivered in the sacred writings, had been applicable only to single independent events, dispersed indifferently through the several ages of the world: In all these cases, I should freely admit, that the argument from prophecy was very precarious and unsatisfactory: I could even suppose, with the deriders of this argument, that so many, and such prophecies, so directed, might
not

not improbably be accounted for, from some odd conjuncture of circumstances; and that the accomplishment of them did by no means infer a certainty of inspiration.

But, if now, on the other hand, it be indisputable, That a vast variety of predictions are to be found in the scriptures of the Old and New Testament; That a great part of these predictions are delivered with the utmost degree of minuteness and particularity; and, lastly, That *all* of them, whether general or particular, respect one common subject, and profess to have, or to expect, their completion in one connected scheme of things, and, upon the matter, in one single person: On this latter supposition, I must still think, that there is great reason to admit the divine inspiration of such prophecies, when seen to be fulfilled.

To convert this supposition into a *proof*, is not within the scope and purpose of this Lecture. The work hath been undertaken

dertaken and discharged by many others : or, it may be sufficient, in so clear a point, to refer you directly to the Scriptures themselves ; which no man can read without seeing, that the prophecies, contained in them, are extremely numerous—that many of these prophecies are minutely circumstantial—and that one person, whoever he be, is the principal object of them all. My concern, at present, is only to shew, that, if the supposition itself be well founded, the *inference*, just now mentioned, is rightly made.

1. First, then, if the prophecies in the Old and New Testament be very numerous, and if those prophecies, so many of them, I mean, as are alledged in this controversy with unbelievers, have had a reasonable completion (and I have a right to make this last supposition, when the question is concerning the *account* to be given of such a fact) : If, I say, we argue from these two assumptions, it must appear highly credible and probable, that so numerous
prophe-

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prophecies, so fulfilled, had not their origin from human conjecture, nor their accomplishment from what we call, *Chance*. For mere conjecture is not usually so happy; nor chance, so constant [*m*], Further still; if the scriptural prophecies have been completed in numerous instances, and if in *no* instance whatsoever can it be clearly shewn that they have failed in the event, the presumption is still stronger, that such coincidence could not be fortuitous; and a material difference between scriptural prophecy, and pagan divination is, at the same time, pointed out. For, that, in the

[*m*] *Casu*, inquis. Itane verò quicquam potest esse *casu* factum, quod omnes habet in se numeros veritatis? Quatuor tali jacti, *casu* Venereum efficiunt. Num etiam centum Venereos, si cccc tales jeceris, *casu* futuros putas? *De Div.* l. i. p. 259. Lutet. 1565.—Had the supposed case been fairly applied to the subject, there had been an end of the dispute; as may appear from the pitiful answer, made in the next book to this reasoning—dixisti multa de *casu*: ut, Venereum jaci posse *casu*, quatuor talis jactis: quadringentis, centum Venereos non posse *casu* consistere. Primum, NESCIO, CUR NON POSSINT.—Was this, like a philosopher?

multitude

multitude of pretended oracles in the days of paganism, some few only should come to pass, while the generality of them fell to the ground, may well be the sport of *fortune* [n]. But, that very many prophecies, recorded in our scriptures, have had an evident completion, when not *one* of all those, there recorded, can be convicted of imposture, must surely be the work of *design*.

The argument cannot be denied to have real weight, though the expression of *all* the prophecies were allowed to be *general*. But this is, by no means, the case. It is further assumed, and is evident to all that have read the Scriptures, that a great number of them are delivered with the utmost degree of minuteness and particularity. And, from this assumption, I infer,

[n] Multa vera, inquit, evadere. Quid, quòd multo plura, falsa? Nónne ipsa varietas, quæ est propria fortunæ, fortunam esse causam, non naturam, docet? *De Div.* l. ii. p. 295. This, methinks, looks like sense.

2. Secondly,

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2. Secondly, that the accomplishment of prophecies, so circumstantially defined, can still less be imputed to mere chance.

Without doubt, if all the prophecies concerning the Messiah had been penned in the style of the first—*that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head*—though even then there might be reason for applying them, exclusively, to the person of Christ, yet, the evidence, that they were intended to be so applied, would have been much obscured by the mode of expression; the wide cover of which might seem to afford room for other applications. But when, to this general prophecy, the theme of all succeeding ones, it is further added, That this seed of the woman, should be the seed of Abraham; of the tribe of Juda; of the family of David; that he should be born at Bethlehem; that he should appear in the world at a time, limited by certain events, and even precisely determined to a certain period:—when, after a particular description of his life and
office,

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office, it is said of him, that he should be betrayed by an intimate friend; and sold for a price, exactly specified; that he should suffer a particular kind of death; should have his hands and feet pierced; should have vinegar given him to drink; and should be buried in the sepulchre of a rich man—with innumerable other particularities of the like nature [o]—When all this, I say, is considered; the improbability, that these *specific* characters should meet in the same person by *chance*, is so great, that a reasonable man will scarce venture on so hazardous a position.

3. Still this is not all. Were we at liberty to apply even *numerous, and circumstantial* prophecies, to *any* person, indifferently, whom they might suit, and to *any* events indiscriminately, to which they might

[o] See the ancient apologists, who are frequent and large on this subject; and, of the moderns, see especially Huetii *Dem. Evang. Prop.* IX.—Bishop Kidder's *Dem. of the Messias*, c. ii. p. 17, 18. London, 1726, fol.—Dr. Clarke's *Evidences of Nat. and Rev. Religion*.—*Pensées de M. Pascal*, p. 108.

correspond,

correspond, sought out at large in the history of mankind, the force of the argument for *design* in such prophecies, might in good measure be eluded. But, when we reflect on what, in part, hath appeared under the last article, that all the scriptural predictions profess to respect one certain scheme of things; run in the line of one people; and point ultimately at one person, whose country, and family, and age, and birth-place are exactly defined; the application of them is so limited and restrained, that, if they suit at all, there is scarce a possibility of excluding actual foresight, and intention.

LET ME, further, observe, that, as, upon this idea of a confined, connected, and dependent scheme, in the prophecies, the detection of imposture, if there be any, is much facilitated; so, on the other hand, if the prophecies can be fairly applied in this way, not only the presumption, that they were given to be so applied, is much increased, but a clearer insight into the scope
and

and meaning of them, is obtained. For, in a system of prophecy, directed to one and the same general end, preceding prophecies prepare the way for interpreting those that follow, and every succeeding prophecy reflects some light on those that went before. Thus, the general evidence, arising from this species of argument, is, in all ways, augmented; while we see, that less room is left to chance in verifying the more clear and direct prophecies, and that fresh light is let in upon such as are more ambiguous or obscure.

It is said, that many passages in the prophets are applied to Jesus, on very slight grounds. This would be true, if the prophetic scriptures, like the pagan oracles, had no determinate scheme in view, and had, for their object, only detached and unconnected events. But, on this scriptural principle, that one common purpose is in the contemplation of that divine spirit, which dictated all those

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writings, That is *expressed*, which is barely intimated; and every applicable prophecy is *rightly* applied: whence it is, that even secondary prophecies have, in the system of revelation, all the light and force of the primary; as, in a former discourse, hath been observed.

This assertion, I know, may startle such persons, as have not attended to the genius of the prophetic writings, or to that general harmony of design and destination, which makes their distinctive character: but it may be rendered familiar to us by reflecting on the *manner*, in which we interpret other writings, somewhat similar to these.

It is generally supposed, and on good grounds, that Virgil wrote his *Æneid* with the view of doing honour to the person and government of Augustus. But, the subject of his work being taken from a former age, this was either to be done, by introducing his encomiums under the form of *prophecies*, or by conveying them indirectly

indirectly in allusive descriptions and what we call, *secondary* applications. The poet hath employed both these methods, with success. The purpose of his *predictions* is clear; for in them the emperor is expressly named: and the ablest critics make no scruple of applying to Augustus all those passages in this poem, which, however they may respect, immediately, other persons, are yet clearly seen to be *applicable* to Him.

We have another instance of the same sort, at home. Our Spenser wrote his famous poem, to illustrate the virtues and reign of Queen Elizabeth. This we know from himself. Though his scene, therefore, be laid in *Faery Land*, yet, whenever we find his fictions agreeing to the history of that princess, or the characters of his knights expressive of those virtues, which distinguished the great persons of her court, we make no doubt of applying them in that way, or of the poet's intending that they should be so applied. These

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applications would not be equally justifiable in *other* works of fancy, written in that time; but the knowledge, we have of the author's general purpose in writing, makes them reasonable in *this*.

It may appear from these examples [p], that, whenever a general scheme is known to be pursued by a writer, whose real or assumed character gives him a right to deal in secondary senses and prophetic anticipations, that scheme becomes the true key, in the hands of his reader, for unlocking the meaning of particular parts; of many parts, which would otherwise not be seen clearly and distinctly to refer to such scheme. The observation applies to the inspired writers, in all its force. We understand, that they had one common and predominant scheme in view, which was *to bear testimony to Jesus*. Their writ-

[p] I take these examples to be more in point, than those given by Bishop Butler in his *Analogy*, P. II. c. vii. p. 386. Lond. 1740: not but those, too, have their weight.

ings

ings are, then, to be interpreted in conformity to that scheme. Not only the more direct prophecies require this interpretation; but, if we will judge in this, as we do in other similar instances, whatever passages occur in those writings, which bear an apt and easy resemblance to the history of Jesus, may, or rather *must*, in all reasonable construction, be applied to him.

Whence we see (to mention it, by the way) that, if no prophecy in the Old Testament had applied to Christ directly in its *primary* sense, Christianity might, yet, support itself on the evidence of prophecy. For the evidence, arising from a *secondary* sense of prophecies, is *real* evidence; and was certainly admitted, as such, by that great man [q], whose mistakes on this subject have offered the occasion of so much vain triumph to infidelity.

Fancy, no doubt, may grow wanton in this sort of applications. It may find, in the prophet or poet, what was never de-

[q] Grotius.

signed by either: but, in the circumstances supposed, the severest reader will not deny, that *much* was probably designed by both. It is impossible to lay down general rules, that shall prevent all abuse in the interpretation of such writings. But good sense will easily see, in particular cases, where this liberty of interpreting is, in *fact*, abused.

It is obvious to remark, that this use of prophecy doth not commence, till the corresponding facts can be produced: that is, till the prophecies are seen to be fulfilled. But this circumstance is no discredit to the prophetic system; which pretends not to give immediate conviction, but to lay in, beforehand, the *means* of conviction to such as shall be in a condition to compare, in due time, the prediction with the event. Till then, prophecy serves only to raise a general expectation of the event predicted; that is, it serves to make men attentive and inquisitive, and to prepare them for that full conviction, which it finally hath
in

in view. And this service, the prophecies of the Old Testament actually did the Jews, who were led by them to expect the Messiah, when he, in fact, appeared among them. And, had they pursued this reasonable method of interpreting the prophecies, not by their prejudices, but by corresponding events, they must have been further led to acknowledge his mission, as being evidently attested by predictions, so fulfilled. But their capital mistake lay in supposing, that their prophecies were sufficiently clear, without the help of any comment from succeeding events; and thus, what they *could not* see beforehand, they *would not* acknowledge, when these events came to pass.

It follows from what hath been said, that the obscurity of the Jewish prophecies concludes nothing against the *use* of those writings, or against the *application* of them, which Christians now make.

Their *declared* use is posterior to the facts, they adumbrate; whence the intervening obscurity of those writings is no just ground of complaint: and the *application* of them to Jesus, now that history hath taught us to understand them better, is made on principles, to which no sober man can object.

On the whole, the general evidence for the truth of Christianity, as resulting from the scriptural prophecies, though possibly not *that*, which some may wish or expect, is yet apparently very considerable. *Some* coincidences might fall out, by accident; and *more* might be imagined. But when *so many*, and *such* prophecies are brought together, and compared with their corresponding events, it becomes ridiculous (because the effect is, in no degree, proportioned to the cause) to say of such coincidences, that they are the creatures of *fancy*, or could have been the work of *chance*.

The

The general Argument from PROPHECY. 121

The text supplies the only just account of such a phænomenon: and the spirit of God, methinks, calls aloud to us, in the language of his son—*These things have I told you before they come, that when they come to pass, ye may believe, that I am He.*

SER.

S E R M O N V.

Prophecies concerning Christ's

F I R S T C O M I N G .

ISAIAH xlii. 9.

*Behold, the former things are come to pass,
and new things do I declare: before they
spring forth, I tell you of them.*

THE preceding discourses were designed, to open the *general idea* of prophecy; and to enforce the *general argument* from it, in proof of our holy Religion.

The way being thus far cleared, we now advance a step farther, and take a nearer view of THE PROPHECIES THEMSELVES.

These

These prophecies may be considered under *two* heads. They either respect, *the person and character and office of the Messiah*; or, *the fate and fortunes of that kingdom*, which he came to establish in the world.

Divines call the *former* of these, Prophecies of his FIRST COMING: and the *other*, Prophecies of his SECOND. Only, it may be proper to observe, That the *second* advent of the Messiah is not, like the *first*, confined to one single and precise period, but is gradual and successive. This distinction is founded in the reason of the thing. He could only come, *in person*, at one limited time. He comes, *in his power and his providence*, through all ages of the church. His *first* coming was then over, when he expired on the cross. His *second*, commenced with his resurrection, and will continue to the end of the world. So that this *last* coming of Jesus is to be understood of his *spiritual kingdom*; which is not one act of sovereignty, exerted at once;

once; but a state or constitution of government, subsisting through a long tract of time, unfolding itself by just degrees, and *coming*, as oft, as the conductor of it thinks fit to interpose by any signal acts of his administration. And in this sense, we are directed to pray, *that his kingdom*, though long since set up, *may come*; that is, may advance through all its stages, till it arrive at that full state of glory, in which it shall shine out in *the great day*, as it is called, the day of judgment.

It will be seen, as we advance in the present inquiry, to what use this distinction serves.

The *former* set of prophecies are presumed to have had their completion, in the history of *Jesus*; The *latter* set, have had, or are to find, their accomplishment, in the history of his *Religion*; and of THESE only, it is the purpose of this Lecture to speak.

But though the prophecies of Christ's *first* coming (so largely and accurately considered

sidered by many great writers) be not the immediate subject of our inquiry, yet they must not be wholly overlooked by us. It will contribute very much to rectify and enlarge our ideas of the divine conduct, in this whole dispensation of prophecy, and to make way for that conviction, which the prophecies of Christ's *second* coming were intended to give, if we stop a while to contemplate the *method and æconomy* of that prophetic system, by which the *first* advent of the Messiah was announced and prepared.

It is assumed, as a first principle on this subject, *That Jesus was the ultimate end and object of all the prophecies* [a]: which beginning from the foundation of the world [b], were, afterwards, occasionally delivered through many ages; till at length this great purpose was prosecuted more intently, by a continued and closely-compacted chain of prophecy; as we see, first, in the patriarchal history, but, chiefly, in the history

[a] Serm. II.

[b] 'Απ' αἰῶνος, Luke i. 70.

of the Jewish state. For, when this people were selected from the other nations, to answer many wise ends of providence, it pleased God to institute a form of government for them, which could not subsist without his frequent interposition; manifested in such a way as might convince them, that they were under the actual and immediate conduct of their divine sovereign. Hence, it became a part of this singular œconomy, to be administered in the way of *Prophecy*; by which it would be seen that the hand of God was upon them in all their more important concerns.

Upon this basis of an *extraordinary providence*, the Jewish government stood: and we are now to see in what *manner* the prophetic spirit, so essential to that polity, was employed.

1. First, we may observe, that, by means of this provision for their civil regimen, an apt and commodious way was opened for carrying on the divine councils,

councils, in regard to *Jesus*; in whom, indeed, the Law itself was to be fulfilled. For, while the civil affairs of the Jewish people furnished the occasion and substance of their prophecies, the divine wisdom, that inspired the prophets, so contrived, as that their religious concerns should, also, be expressed, or implied in them. The general theme of the *prophet*, was some temporal success or calamity of the Jewish state: the secret purpose of the *inspirer* was, occasionally at least, and when he saw fit, to predict the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah [c].

We have innumerable instances of this sort in the Jewish prophets; but few, more remarkable than that of *Isaiah's* prophecy, addressed to *Ahaz*, king of *Judah*, concerning his deliverance from the two kings

[c] This use and intent of prophecy was seen, and admirably expressed, by the great *M. Pascal*—"Les prophéties sont mêlées de prophéties particulières, et de celles du Messie, afin que les prophéties du Messie ne fussent pas sans preuves, et que les prophéties particulières ne fussent pas sans fruit." *Pensées*, p. 112.

of

of Samaria and Damascus. In the *primary*, but lower sense of this prophecy, the sign given was to assure Ahaz, that the land of Judæa should *speedily* be delivered from its two Royal invaders. But it had likewise *another*, and more important purpose. The introduction of the prophecy, the singular stress laid upon it, and the exact sense of the terms, in which it is expressed, make it probable, in a high degree, that it had some such purpose: and the event hath clearly proved, that the *sign given* had a respect to the miraculous birth of Christ, and to a deliverance much more momentous than that of Ahaz from his present distressful situation—*Hear ye now, O HOUSE OF DAVID — The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Isaiab, vii. 13, 14.* Admit that these words are capable of being explained, in some sort, of the *child* now given to be a sign, to the King of Judæa, of his deliverance within two or three years, as expressed

pressed in the following verses; still, who sees not that terms so emphatical and energetic are more *properly* understood of *another* child, to whose birth and character they are found, in the event, to be exactly suited? And, if more properly, who can doubt that these terms are *naturally*, that is, reasonably understood of that other child, when we consider with what ideas the mind of the prophet was stored, and what the ultimate end and object was, by supposition, of the prophet's inspiration? The child promised was a *sign* to Ahaz of his deliverance; yet a sign too, that is, a *type*, to the house of David, of another deliverance, which they expected, which their prophets had frequently foretold, and which we have here announced in the *name* of this miraculous child, IMMANUEL, or eminently, *The Deliverer*.

There is nothing in this *sign* [d], thus interpreted, but what is easy and unforced;

[d] *The Lord himself shall give you a sign*, Isai. vii. 14.
—This SIGN (and the extraordinary introduction of it,

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I mean,

I mean, if we bear in mind the genius and character of the Jewish prophecies. The former event, signified in the prophecy, was merely *civil*: the latter, concerned the *spiritual* kingdom of Christ. They were both predicted together: and the preceding event, when it came to pass, was, further,

in the words quoted, indicates no less) had plainly a recondite and even complicated meaning!

1. As addressed to *Abaz*, it was simply an ASSURANCE, that his deliverance from his two great enemies was now at hand.

2. As addressed to the *house of David*—*Hear ye now, O house of David*—it was a TYPE of Christ.

3. It was, further, a TOKEN, or pledge, that the remote deliverance of the house of David by Immanuel, should hereafter take place, just as the approaching deliverance of Ahaz, by the prophet's Son, would be seen to do.

4. This sign, when fulfilled in the near event, would, thenceforward, become a PROOF, or evidence, that it would be fulfilled in the remote one.

5. Lastly, in the Antitype, the sign was a MIRACLE, properly so called.

So eminently was this Child, a SIGN! A *sign*, in all the *senses* of the word, as employed by the Jewish prophets; and to all the *purposes*, for which signs were given.

to induce an *expectation*, that the other event would, in due time, follow. For

2. Secondly, it appears, that, to excite attention to these SPIRITUAL predictions, more obscure than the other, and regarding events more remote, care was taken to secure the authority of the prophet, by the completion of his *civil* predictions in events, distinctly described, and near at hand. Thus, Moses might be believed by the Jews in what he said, *of a prophet to be raised up*, in a future age, *like to himself*; when they saw his prophetic blessings and curses upon them, according to their deserts in the land of Canaan, so speedily and so punctually executed. Thus, too, their prophet, Isaiah, might reasonably expect to find credit with them, for the glorious things predicted by him of the great deliverer, the Messiah; when their deliverance from the Babylonish captivity was seen so certainly to verify his prediction of that event. The prophet himself exults in this argument, as decisive and

unanswerable. *Behold*, says he, in the text, *the former things are come to pass*, i. e. the prophecies, I have delivered to you concerning your redemption from the Assyrian bondage will soon be so exactly completed, that I regard them as things *past*; and *therefore new things do I declare*; hence I claim your belief of other prophecies, concerning a much greater redemption, to take place hereafter, though there be no appearance, as yet, of any causes tending to produce it; *for before they spring forth, I tell you of them*. And this appears to be the general method of *all* God's prophets.

3. With these *new things*, these Spiritual prophecies concerning the *first* coming of the Messiah, were likewise intermixed other prophecies, which ran out beyond that term and prefigured the great events of his SECOND coming: and the warrant for admitting *these*, would be the completion of those other prophecies, in the person

son and sufferings of Christ [*f*]. That there are such prophecies in the Old Testament, will be shewn hereafter. In the mean time, it will not be thought incredible, that if Jesus be indeed the end of the prophetic scheme, the revolutions of his *government* should be foretold, as well as the circumstances of his personal appearance; in other words, that the consummation of that design, which providence was carrying on, would not be overlooked, when the steps and gradations of it were so distinctly noted. For, in any reasonable design whatsoever, the *end* is first and principally in view, though the *means* engage, and may seem to engross, the attention of its author. It will then, I say, be no surprise to us to find, that prophecy set out with announcing the kingdom of the Mes-

[*f*] Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν τὰ γινόμενα ἤδη πάντα ἀποδείκνυται, πρὶν ἢ γενέσθαι, προκεκαρῦχθαι διὰ τῶν προφητῶν, ἀνάγκη καὶ περὶ τῶν ὁμοίως προφητευθέντων, μελλόντων δὲ γίνεσθαι, εἰς τὴν ἔχουσιν ὡς πάντως γενησομένων.

J. MARTYR, Apol. I. c. 87.

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siab;

siah; that it never lost sight of that future œconomy; and only produced it into clearer view, as the season approached for the introduction of it.

THUS MUCH concerning the *order and method* of the Jewish prophecies; in which one cannot but adore the profound wisdom of their author. The *civil* prophecies are, at once, the vehicle, and the credentials, of the *spiritual*, concerning the *first* coming of Jesus; and these last, in their turn, support the credit of others, which point still further at his *second* coming: a subject, more than intimated by the *legal* prophets, but resumed and amply displayed by the *evangelical*. Whence, we see, that the prophetic system is so constructed, as, in the progress and various evolutions of it, to illustrate itself, and to afford an internal evidence of its divinity. One great purpose pervades the whole: and the parts, of which it consists, gradually prepare and mutually sustain each other.

But

But this subject, so curious and important, is not yet to be dismissed. It remains to be considered, whether *chance*, or *imposture*, can in any degree account for so extensive, so connected, and so intricate a system.

On the very face of the prophetic scriptures it appears, that one ultimate purpose is in the contemplation of all the prophets. This purpose is unfolded by successive predictions, delivered in distant times, under different circumstances, and by persons, who cannot be suspected of acting in concert with each other. It does not appear, that the later prophets always understood the drift of the more antient; or, that either of them clearly apprehended the whole scope and purpose of their own predictions. Yet, on comparing all their numerous prophecies with each other, and with the events, in which it is now presumed they have had their completion, we find a perfect harmony and consistency between them. Nothing is advanced by one prophet,

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phet, that is contradicted by another. An unity of design is conspicuous in them all; yet without the least appearance of *collusion*, since *each* prophet hath his own peculiar views, and enlarges on facts and circumstances, unnoticed by any other.

Further still, these various and successive prophecies are so intimately blended, and, as we may say, incorporated with each other, that the credit of all depends on the truth of each. For, the accomplishment of them falling in different times, every preceding prophecy becomes surety, as it were, for those that follow; and the failure of any one must bring disgrace and ruin on all the rest.

Then, again, consider that the prophetic spirit, which kept operating so uniformly and perpetually in what is called the *former age*, ceased at that very time, when the great object, it had in view, was disclosed; when that future œconomy, which it first and last predicted, was introduced: *a time*, too, which was precisely determined
by

by the old prophets themselves. Could they answer for what *design* or *chance* might be able to bring about? Is it credible, that this perennial fount of prophecy, which ran so copiously from Adam to Christ, and watered all the ages of the Jewish church, should stop, at once, in so critical a season; and should never flow again in any future age; if fortune, or fraud, or fanaticism, had dispensed its streams; if any thing indeed, but the hand of God, had opened its source, and directed its current?

Nor let it be objected that a succession of prophets was *interrupted* for some ages before the coming of Christ. It was so: but not, till preceding prophets had marked out the precise *time* of his coming [g]; not, till Malachi, with whom the word of prophecy ceased for a time, had foretold that this interrupted series should be resumed and finally closed by Elijah, the last Jewish prophet and *precursor* of the

[g] Isaiah vii. 16. Daniel ix. 24.

Messiah [b]; and not, till it had been expressly declared, that this eclipsed light of prophecy should break forth again with redoubled lustre, in the *days* of the Messiah [i]. Who would not conclude, then, from this very intermission, that prophecy was given, or withheld, as the wisdom of God ordained, and not as the caprice or policy of man directed?

It may not be pretended, that the age, in which prophecy finally ceased among the Jews, will account for the suppression of this faculty, "for that it was an age of the greatest turbulency and disorder, and that their ruin and dispersion soon after followed." This pretence, I say, is altogether frivolous. For it was precisely in those circumstances, that their antient prophets were most numerous, and their inspirations most abundant. It was during the calamitous season of their captivities that the prophetic power had been most

[b] Mal. iv. 5. Luke xvi. 16.

[i] Joel ii. 28, 29.

signally exercised among the Jews. And now, when they were carried captive into all lands, not a single prophet arose, or hath arisen to this day, either for their reproof, or consolation [k].

If it be said, "that the pagan oracles ceased, too, about the same time; and that the same cause, namely, the diffused light and knowledge of the Augustan age, was fatal to both;" besides, that this diffusion of light, for obvious reasons, was not likely to affect the Jewish prophecies, and did not, as we certainly know, in any degree diminish the credit of them, with that people, the fact itself, assumed in the objection, is plainly false. For the pagan oracles continued for several ages

[k] Is not their case exactly delineated by the prophet Ezekiel—*Mischief shall come upon mischief, and rumour shall be upon rumour; then shall they SEEK A VISION OF THE PROPHET; i. e. they shall seek what they shall not find, for the LAW shall perish from the priest, and COUNCIL from the antients; i. e. their ecclesiastical and civil polity, to which prophecy was annexed, shall be utterly abolished. See Ezekiel vii. 26. and compare Isaiah iii. 1, 2.*

after

after that of Augustus; they became less frequent, only, as Christianity gained ground; and were not silenced, but among the last struggles of expiring paganism [1]. So that if the Jewish prophecies, like those of the Gentile world, had been the issue of *fraud*, or *fanaticism* (*principles*, that operate at all times, and, with redoubled force and activity, in the dark days of persecution) one does not see, why they might not have continued to this day among the bigoted professors of that religion.

Now, put all these things together, that is, The long duration of the prophetic system—the mutual dependance and close connection of its several parts—the consistency and uniformity of its views, all terminating in one point—and the final suppression of it (as was likewise foretold) at the very time, when those views were accomplished; consider, I say, all this, and see, if there be not something more than

[1] See A. VAN DALE, *De Oraculorum ethnicorum duratione atque interitu*.

a blind credulity in the advocates for the divinity of such a system. See, if there be any instance upon record — of so numerous prophecies — so long continued — so intimately related to each other and to one common end — so apparently verified — and so signally concluded. If there be, I shall not wonder at the suspense and hesitation of *wise men*, on this subject: but if, on the other hand, no such thing was ever seen, or heard of, out of the land of Judæa, they must excuse us if we incline to think their diffidence misplaced, and their scruples unnecessary, at least, if not disingenuous.

I descend no farther into a detail on the scriptural prophecies concerning Christ's *first coming*. The immensity of the subject, and the plan prescribed to me in this Lecture, equally restrain me from this attempt. *Obscurities* there may, and must be, in so vast a scheme: *Objections* may, and must occur to the construction and application of particular prophecies. But
let

let any serious man take the Bible into his hands; let him consider, not *all* the prophecies in that book, but such as are more obvious and intelligible; and let him compare such *prophecies*, as he must acknowledge, and may, in part at least, understand, with the *facts*, in which he sees their completion, or so far, as he may think it *probable* that they have been completed; and I dare be confident that such an inquirer will be much struck with the amount of the evidence from prophecy, in support of divine revelation. If, indeed, on this general survey, he find nothing to affect him, I shall not desire him to push his researches into the more secret and mysterious prophecies: much less, shall I advise him to wade through that cloud of smaller difficulties, in which the ignorant temerity of some writers, and the *obscure diligence* of others, hath involved *this*, as it easily may any other, subject.

TO SPEAK PLAINLY, the only consideration, which to me seems likely to perplex

plex fair and candid minds, is this—
 “That the argument from prophecy is understood to be addressed to those, who admit the divinity of the Jewish scriptures—that the Jews themselves were eminently in this situation—that, besides this advantage, the Jews were better qualified, than any others, to interpret their own prophecies, and to judge of their completion—and yet, that these very men neither were, nor are convinced by this argument.”

Several things are here asserted, which deserve to be explained. I take them in an inverted order.

I. It is said, “*that the Jews were not, and are not to this day, convinced by the argument from prophecy.*” This allegation is in part false: for multitudes [m], from among the Jews, were, in the apostolic

[m] The sacred text says—*myriads*—Οἰωνοὶς, ἀδελφοί, πόσαι μυριάδες εἰσὶν Ἰουδαίων τῶν πιστευόντων—Acts xxi. 20.

age, converted to Christianity; and these are well known to have laid a peculiar stress on this argument. The greater part of that people, indeed, disbelieved, and have continued to this day in their infidelity. But then let it be considered, 1. that we have an adequate cause of this effect, in the *prejudices* of the Jewish nation; *prejudices*, of which their whole history evidently convicts them. 2. That, notwithstanding their rejection of Jesus, they admit the existence and authority of those prophecies, which we apply to him; and that they themselves have constantly applied these very prophecies to their expected Messiah: so that the question between us is only this, Whether they, or we, *rightly* apply them. 3. That their perverse obstinacy in refusing to submit to the evidence of their prophecies, is itself foretold by their own prophets.

II. But it is further said, "*that their authority, in this controversy, is greater than ours,*"

ours, for that they must best understand their own prophecies, and judge best of their completion."

1. I do not perceive on what ground of reason, this is said. The old prophecies belong to us, as well as to them; and have been considered with as much diligence by Christian, as by Jewish expositors. Their customs, their history, their traditions, are equally known to both parties. Their very language hath been studied by Christians with a care, not inferior to that which the Jews themselves employ upon it; with a *care*, that not unfrequently, in *both*, hath degenerated into superstition.

If it be said, "that the *ancient* Jews, that is, the Jews in the time of Christ, must have been better qualified, than we now are, to interpret the prophecies, the language, they spoke, being only a dialect of that in which the prophecies are written;" the answer is already given, under the last article: to which we may

further add, that Christianity being much better understood now, than it was then, the force of the prophetic language concerning it (if, indeed, the prophecies have any such thing in view) must be more distinctly apprehended, in many instances, by Christians at this day, than it could be by the Jews, even when they spoke a dialect of the Hebrew language. So that still I do not see, upon the whole, what advantage the Jews, whether of ancient or modern times, can be thought to have over us, in explaining the prophetic scriptures. And then

2. As to the *completion* of the prophecies, the same histories are in the hands of both: and if they do not apply them, as we do, the appeal is open to common sense. Every man is left at liberty to judge for himself, which side is best supported in the application of them. The prejudice might, indeed, be thought equal on *both* sides, if it were not decided by their own scriptures, that no prejudice of
of

of any people upon earth was ever so invincible, as that of the Jews.

3. Lastly, on both heads, there is a peculiar presumption, that they, and not we, are misled by prejudice: it is this: They were led by their prophecies, as interpreted by themselves, to expect that they would be completed at the *time*, in which, we say, they were completed; and it was not till after the coming of Christ that they began to interpret them differently, and to look out for another completion of them. Judge then, if they, or we, are likely to have erred most, through prejudice, in expounding and applying the prophecies. The natural and proper sense will be thought to be that, in which we take them; for that sense occurred first to themselves, and was, in truth, *their* sense, before we adopted it.

When I say—*their sense*—I mean, especially, in respect to the *time*, which they had fixed for the accomplishment of the prophecies concerning the Messiah: for, as

to their giving a *temporal* sense to some prophecies, in which we find a *spiritual*, that is another matter, concerning which, as I said, the appeal lies to every competent and dispassionate inquirer. In the mean time, it must be thought some presumption in favour of the Christian interpretation, that, whereas the Jews, in rejecting a spiritual or mystical sense of those prophecies (which yet is admitted by them, without scruple, on other occasions, and is well suited to the genius of their whole religion) are driven to the necessity of supposing a *two-fold Messiah* — a new conceit, taken up, without warrant from their scriptures, and against their own former ideas and expectations — WE, on the contrary, by the help of that spiritual sense, are able to explain all the prophecies of *one and the same Messiah*, conformably to the *event*, and even to the *time* which the Jews themselves had prefixed for the completion of them.

Now,

Now, when, of two interpretations, *one* has apparently all the marks of shift, constraint, and distress in it, and the *other* comes out easy, uniform, and consistent: we may guess beforehand, as I said, which of them is likely to be well-founded.

III. Still it is pretended, "that the argument from prophecy is properly addressed to those only who admit the divinity of the Jewish scriptures, as the Jews have invariably done; and that it hath no force, but on that previous supposition. Why then is the argument pressed on others, who do not believe the divine authority of those scriptures? And how should it prevail with *any*, whether believers or not, when the Jews themselves, who of all men most firmly believe that authority, are not convinced by it?"

The *latter* part of the difficulty, which respects the incredulity of the Jews, hath been already removed; so far, I mean, as

it is founded on their prejudices. As for the *assertion*, "That the argument from prophecy presupposes the truth and divinity of the Jewish scriptures, and must therefore have most weight with the Jews, or rather hath no weight at all, but with them, or with others, who admit that common principle," though something, like this, may have been said, I take it to be wholly unsupported as well by *fact*, as by any *good reason*.

1. I argue against this assumption from *fact*; that is, from the *method*, taken by the early Christians to convert the Gentile world, and from the *success* of that method.

If we look into the history of the Gospel, we shall find the Apostle Peter, pressing this argument from prophecy on the gentile Cornelius [n]; and the Apostle Paul, urging it with effect, on the Jews indeed first, but also on the Asiatic Gentiles [o].

[n] Acts x.

[o] Acts xiii. 42. 48.

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If we turn to the Christian apologists, we shall find them addressing this topic to Gentile unbelievers, nay, as venturing the whole cause of Christianity on this single argument [p]. Justin Martyr makes as free use of it in his apology to the Antonines, as in his dialogues with Trypho. We know, too, the success of this argument, thus employed, in many instances: and therefore see, as well the *fitness* of the argument to produce this effect, as the *judgement* of the Apostles and primitive Christians concerning its fitness. But to come
2. to the reason of the thing.

The Jews, who professed to believe, and did, in fact, believe, the divine inspiration of their sacred oracles, were, doubtless, bound by their own principles, to expect

[p] Τίτι γὰρ ἂν λόγῳ ἀνθρώπῳ σταθευθῆναι ἐπιθόμεθα, ὅτι
πρωτότοκῳ τῷ ἀγεννήτῳ ἔστι, καὶ αὐτὸς τὴν κρίσιν τῷ πατρὶ,
ἀνθρωπείῳ γένει ποιήσεσθαι, εἰ μὴ μαρτύρια, περὶ ἰληθῆν
αὐτὸν ἀνθρώπου γενόμενον, κεκηρυγμένα περὶ αὐτοῦ εὐρομεν,
καὶ ὅτως γενόμενα ὁρώμεν;

JUSTIN MARTYR, Apol. i. c. 88.

with assurance the due completion of them. The Gentiles, who did not previously respect those oracles, as of divine authority, but regarded them only in the light of human conjectures, yet saw that such passages, whether we call them oracular or conjectural, did, in truth, occur in the Jewish scriptures; and were obliged to admit, on the faith of historical testimony, that those scriptures were composed by the persons whose names they bear, and at the times fixed for the composition of them. What then is the difference of the two cases? Only this: the Jews believed that their oracles would be fulfilled, because they held them to be divine; the Gentiles had to wait till those oracles were fulfilled, before they acknowledged their divinity. In either case, the argument is independent of the belief, or the expectation, and turns on the completion only. Then, indeed, the Jew sees that his belief was well founded, and the Gentile admits that the prediction was divine.

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The mistake would be equal, on the other hand, to conceive, that the argument from prophecy pre-supposes the divine inspiration of the New Testament. It pre-supposes only the historical truth of that book. Admit this, and compare the events recorded in that history, with the prophecies, to which they correspond, and the divinity of both Testaments is proved. For then, the pretensions of Jesus are made good, by the *completion* of the prophecies; and the inspiration of the prophets is concluded, from the *delivery* of them.

In both cases (let me repeat it) it is not the authority of the books containing the prophecies, nor of the books recording the facts, in which they are fulfilled, but simply the *completion* of the prophecies in those facts, seen and acknowledged, which infers the divinity of either Testament. Even the Jew would retract his high opinion of the prophecies, if he did not admit or expect the accomplishment of
them;

them; and the Christian would renounce his faith in Jesus, if his history did not accord to the prophecies, alledged.

'Tis true, that, with either, the argument would gain more *attention*, than with such as professed no previous belief in the divinity of the Old or New Testament. But its force is really the same, on both suppositions. It lies merely in the conviction, which one hath from the evidence produced, that certain prophetic passages were delivered in the *Old* Testament, and have been fulfilled by certain corresponding events, related in the *New*.

On the whole, there is no reason to conclude, that we are not as good judges of the argument from prophecy, as the Jews were; or, that this argument ought to have the less weight with us, because the Jews were not convinced by it. For the argument doth, in no degree, depend on *faith*, but is calculated to produce it. It is equally strong, or equally weak, to a Christian, or Jew, or even to an unbeliever:

liever: the sole point in question being this, Whether such things, as were prophetically delivered, appear to have been fulfilled: a point, on which common sense and common honesty will equally decide, on every supposition.

I know, indeed, that, unless we suppose the inspiration of the prophets, *some* passages, delivered by them, will not so probably be thought to *intend* Christ, as they will be, if we acknowledge that principle: and, on the other hand, that there are *some* circumstances in the history of Jesus, which will not be so readily seen to *refer* to preceding prophecies, if the inspiration of Jesus and his Apostles be not previously admitted. But I do not argue, at present, from either of these topics. There are passages enough, clearly *predictive* of the Messiah, and clearly *accomplished* in him, to afford a solid foundation for the argument from prophecy, as here instituted, without looking out for any other

other of more nice and ambiguous interpretation.

Hence we see the dangerous mistake of those, who contend that the argument from prophecy hath not, of itself, the nature of a *direct positive proof*, of our religion. Prophecies fulfilled, I mean such prophecies as *those* in question, prove invincibly the divine inspiration of the prophets. But, if the prophets were inspired, the divine mission of him, in whom the predicted marks of the Messiah meet, must needs be acknowledged. And what more is required to prove the truth of Christianity? Not even the evidence of *miracles*, performed by Christ, if the prophecies had not made them one mark of his character. The truth is, *Prophecies* and *Miracles* are, in themselves, two distinct positive proofs. Either proof is *direct*, and would have been sufficient, if the other had not been given. But the divine goodness, for our more abundant satisfaction, and to leave infidelity without excuse,

excuse, hath made the one proof dependent on the other: so that neither the argument from prophecy is complete, without the *miracles*; nor the argument from miracles, as applied to Christ, unless he likewise appear to have fulfilled the *prophecies*. Can we desire a stronger proof, that neither *they*, who predicted the *miracles*, were *false prophets*; nor *he*, who claimed to himself the application of ALL the *prophecies*, was a *false Messiah*?

The reflexions, on the *method and order* of the prophecies, of those especially concerning Christ's FIRST COMING; together with what has been said on the *independency* of this argument on Jewish or Christian concessions; may serve to convince us, That we shall do well to suspend our conclusions concerning the evidence of prophecy, till we have examined the *whole* subject. In the mean time, *this part* of the subject, thus far opened and explained, leads us, with advantage,

vantage, to the consideration of *that*, which is yet behind and is the peculiar object of this Lecture, I mean, *the prophecies concerning CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.*

SER.

S E R M O N VI.

Prophecies concerning Christ's
SECOND COMING.

ISAIAH xlii. 9.

*Behold, the former things are come to pass,
and new things do I declare: before they
spring forth, I tell you of them.*

IT must strike the most careless reader
of the prophecies to observe, that the
general subject of them all was announced
from the earliest time, and was only drawn
out more distinctly by succeeding prophets:
that, of the two *ages*, into which the
world of God, I mean his *religious* world,
is divided in holy scripture, the *former*,
which abounds most in prophecy, was
plainly

plainly made subservient to the *latter* : that not only the events of that preceding age are foretold by its own prophets, but that the fortunes of the last, and very remote age, are occasionally revealed by them ; and that the same oracles, which attest the *first coming* of Christ, as if impatient to be confined to so narrow bounds, overflow, as it were, into the future age, and expatiate on the principal facts and circumstances of his *second coming*.

By this divine artifice, if I may so speak, the two dispensations, the Jewish and Christian, are closely tied together, or rather compacted into one intire harmonious system ; such, as we might expect, if it were indeed formed, and conducted by him, *to whom are known all his works from the beginning* [a].

So that, in respect of the fortunes, which were to befall the Christian church, even in the *latter days*, we may still ask, in the triumphant terms of the Jewish pro-

[a] Acts xv. 18.

phet — *Have ye not known? Have ye not heard? Hath it not been told you from the beginning? Have ye not understood from the foundation of the earth [b]?*

But, though this subject was opened by the old prophets, so far as seemed expedient in that age, and clearly enough to shew the integrity and continuity of the whole system, it was more illustriously, because more distinctly, displayed by the evangelical prophets.

And here, again, the same provision of wisdom and goodness meets us, as before. The Christian prophets, like the Jewish, bespeak our attention to what they reveal of the greater and more distant events in their dispensation, by other less momentous prophecies, which were speedily to be accomplished [c]; thus, impressing upon us

[b] *Isaiah xl. 21.*

[c] We see this design very plainly, in the prophecies of Jesus concerning *his own death and resurrection*; concerning *the descent of the holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost*; concerning events, that were to befall *his disciples*; and in other instances.

an awful sense of their divine foresight, and procuring an easy credit from us to their subsequent predictions: *while the events, which both these prophetic schemes point out, are so distributed through all time, as to furnish, successively, to the several ages of the world, the means of a fresh and still growing conviction* [d].

As THE ORDER of these Discourses, now, leads me to exemplify this *last* observation, I shall do it in THREE remarkable prophecies concerning the Christian church; I mean those, which respect

1. THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.
2. THE DISPERSION OF THE JEWS. And
3. THE CONVERSION OF THE GENTILES.

I refer to these prophecies, as well known. They are in the number of those, which, in part, were delivered by the

[a] La plus grande des preuves de Jesus Christ, ce sont les propheties. C'est aussi à quoi Dieu a la plus pourvû; car l'évenement, qui les a remplies, est un MIRACLE SUBSISTANT depuis la naissance de l'Eglise jusqu'à la fin. *M. Pascal.*

Jewish

Jewish prophets; and afterwards, more distinctly revealed by the Christian.

I. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE JEWISH CITY AND TEMPLE, is an event of the utmost moment in the view of revealed religion. It accomplished a great number of prophecies, and vindicated the honour of Jesus, by a signal vengeance on his murderers. It answered, besides, *other* important purposes of divine providence; by putting a visible and necessary end to the Jewish œconomy, which was now to give way to the dispensation of the Messiah; and by dispersing the Jews into all lands, for many wise and admirable reasons. Hence, of all the prophecies, delivered by Christ himself (who was a prophet, though indeed *much more than a prophet*) *This* alone is displayed by him, at large, and in all its circumstances.

If any man, unacquainted with these matters, should doubt, whether this prophecy of Jesus, as recorded in three of the

four Gospels, were not delivered, that is *forged*, after the event, I might refer him to the numerous writers on that subject. But I hold it sufficient to say, 1, On the faith of all antiquity, that these Gospels were not only written, but published to the world, before the destruction of Jerusalem—2, that the early date of their composition is apparent from many internal characters, dispersed through these writings—3, that no interpolation of this prophecy could afterwards take place, because the prophecy is interwoven with the general thread of the history—and, 4, lastly, that no unbeliever of the primitive times, whether Jew or Gentile, when pressed, as both frequently were, by this prophecy, appears to have had recourse to the charge, either of forgery, or interpolation [e].

The authenticity and early date of the prophecy is, then, on these grounds, assumed.

[e] For these particulars, see Dr. Jortin's *Rem. on Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 1. p. 20—89.

I will,

I will, further, suppose (because the history of Josephus invincibly proves it) that all the particulars, mentioned in this prophecy, concurred in the *event*.

“ But this, you will say, might well be: for what more *uniform*, than the characters of distress in a *great* city, forced and desolated by a superior enemy? And what more *probable*, than that, some time or other, such should be the fate of *every* great city?”

It may further be insinuated, “ That, if ever Jerusalem was to be destroyed, the obstinate humour of its inhabitants, and the *nature of the place*, would probably draw this destruction upon it, in the way it actually happened, in the way of *siege* [*f*]: that, then, all the miseries, endured by the Jews, would naturally fall on a despe-

[*f*] An event, it must be owned, the more likely to happen, as the Jews had always been disposed to *trust* to their *high and fenced walls*; which yet could never defend them from their enemies, as their history shews, and, as Moses had distinctly foretold, *Deut. xxviii. 52.*

rate people from an irritated and successful conqueror; above all, in antient times, when conquest and clemency were little acquainted with each other: that, as for the preceding *wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes* (which are mentioned, in the prophecy, as *signs* of the approaching desolation) *these*, are such usual things in the course of the world, as may be safely made the prognostics of any predicted event whatsoever: that Jesus, therefore, as any other wise man, might form his prediction on these principles; and trust to time, and the passions of mankind, for the completion of it."

Now, let all this be allowed (and scepticism itself will hardly make other or greater demands upon us) still, the honour of Jesus stands secure; and this fine fabric of suspicion is overturned at once, if we reflect on *two or three* circumstances, unluckily, and, if the prophet be not divine, unnecessarily wrought into the texture of this famous prophecy.

First,

First, I observe, that this destruction was to come from *the hands of the Romans* [g]; and without doubt, if it were to happen in any reasonable time, it could not so probably be expected to come from any other quarter. But, then, was it *likely* that Judæa, at that time a Roman province, should be thus desolated by its own masters?

[g] Matth. xxiv. 28. and compare Luke xvii. 37. *“Ὅπου γὰρ ἔσται ἡ τὸ πῶμα, ἐκεῖ συναχθήσονται οἱ ἄελοι.*—Meaning by *eagles*, the standards of the Roman army.—Some writers of name have, indeed, observed, that this is only a *proverbial* expression. True: but proverbial prophecies are often fulfilled in the strict literal sense of the expression; as Grotius well observes on Matth. xxvi. 23. *hic quoque accidit, quod in multis aliis vaticiniis, ut verba—non tantum secundum proverbialem loquendi modum, sed etiam secundum exactissimam verborum significationem implerentur.*—If the reader calls to mind the prediction of our Lord, as it is elsewhere expressed, without a figure—*when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with ARMIES* [Luke xxi. 20.]—and compares it with the *event*, he will hardly make a doubt whether *eagles*, in those figurative predictions, which respect the same subject, namely, the destruction of Jerusalem, were not intended by our Lord to denote, the ROMAN armies.

Was it to be *presumed*, that so small a province should dare to engage in a formal contest with Rome, the mistress of the world, as well as of Judæa? with Rome, then in the zenith of her power, and irresistible to all nations? Was it *conceivable*, if any future distraction of that mighty empire should tempt the Jews to oppose their feeble efforts to its high fortune, that a vengeance so signal, so complete, should be taken upon them? that nothing less than a total *extermination* should be proposed, and effected? The ruin of the temple at Jerusalem was to be so entire, that *one stone should not be left upon another*. Allow for the exaggerated terms of a prophetic description; still, was it *imaginable*, that the Romans should, in any proper sense of the words, execute this denunciation? Was it *their* way, as it was afterwards that of the Goths, to wage war with *stones*? Was it a principle with *them*, to beat down the *pride* of buildings, as well as of *men* [*b*]? Would even their *policy*, or

[*b*] —*debellare superbos*. Virg.

their

their *pride*, have suffered them to blot out an antient, a renowned, an illustrious temple, the chief ornament of their province, the glory of the east, and the trophy of their own conquests?

Such an event was very improbable, in contemplation: and history shews, that it did not come to pass in any ordinary way. For the instrument, in the hands of heaven, of this exterminating vengeance, was a man, the most unlikely of all others, to inflict it; a man, who by nature abhorred such extremities; who, in fact, did his utmost to prevent this dreadful catastrophe, and *could not* prevent it [*i*].—Sill, a more unmanageable circumstance, than this, occurs in the prophecy. For,

Secondly, it is implied that ONE of our Lord's disciples should survive this desola-

[*i*] Assuredly this prophecy was not in the number of those, of which it hath been said—*The prophecy is not occasioned by the event, but the event by the prophecy*—*L'événement n'est pas prédit parce qu'il arrivera; mais il arrive parce qu'il a été prédit.* ROUSSEAU, *Nouv. Hel.* t. iv. p. 314. n. Neuf. 1764.

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tion [k]: and it is expressly asserted, that the then *subsisting generation should not pass away, before all these things were accomplished* [l]. They WERE accomplished, within forty years from the date of the prophecy, and before the death of that disciple. The fact is certain and undeniable: I leave the rest to your own reflexions.

Thirdly, warning is given in this prophecy to the disciples of Jesus, to fly from this impending ruin; and a signal is held out to them, for that purpose [m]. It is further predicted, that they should avail themselves of this signal; and so entirely escape the snare, in which the rest of their countrymen should be taken, that *not a hair of their heads should perish* [n]. And this part of the prophecy was, it seems, completed [o].

[k] Matth. xvi. 28.

[l] Matth. xxiv. 34.

[m] Luke xxi. 20.

[n] Luke xxi. 18. Acts ii. 21. Mark xiii. 20.

[o] See the learned Bishop Newton's *Dissertations on the Prophecies*, vol. ii. p. 268. n.

Lastly,

Lastly, this prophecy was incumbered with another strange event, *needlessly* incumbered with it, if the whole were an imposture. It is said, that *the Gospel should be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations*, before it should be fulfilled. Was it not enough to say, that the prophecy should be accomplished in the time of that generation, and in the life-time of St. John, without adding so unlikely a circumstance, as that a general promulgation of the Gospel, by a few unlettered and unfriended fishermen, should precede the accomplishment of it?—I know, that this part of the prophecy admits a secondary sense: but, in the primary sense, it was so far fulfilled, as to astonish us with the divine foresight of its author.

I omit other considerations, that might be alledged. But you see that, setting aside such particulars in the prophecy, as sceptical men may think themselves able to draw within the sphere of *human conjecture*, there are several things expressed
in

in it, so strange to all apprehension, so unlikely to happen, so impossible for any natural sagacity to foresee, and yet so certainly and punctually fulfilled, that nothing short of *divine inspiration* can possibly account for them. The prophecy, in all its parts, is divine: but in *these*, its divinity is clear and incontestable.

II. THE DISPERSION OF THE JEWS, is another event, which deserves your consideration.

Moses himself had predicted this circumstance of their fortune, in terms of the greatest energy. He had told them—*that they should be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth, and that they should be scattered among all people from one end of the earth even unto the other*—that, among the nations, into which they should be driven, *they should find no ease, nor rest, and that they should be only oppressed and crushed away*—that they should become an astonishment, a proverb, and a by-word among all nations—

nations—and that *their plagues should be wonderful, and of long continuance* [p]. These prophecies had been, to a certain degree, fulfilled in other parts of their history: but there was to be a time, when *the wrath of God should come upon them to the uttermost* [q]. This time was now come, when their city was destroyed, and their land desolated, by the arms of Titus. Then, as Jesus prophesied of them, *were the days of vengeance, that all things, which were written, should be fulfilled*: then, were they *to be led away captive into all nations*: and thenceforth, *was Jerusalem to be trodden down of the Gentiles, until THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES SHOULD BE FILLED* [r].

Nor say, that this *last* prophecy is indefinite: for *the times of the Gentiles* is a period, well known in the prophetic writings; a period, of long duration indeed,

[p] Deut. xxviii.

[q] 1 Theff. ii. 16.

[r] Luke xxi. 22. 24.

as the event hath shewn; yet a period, marked out by other prophecies (which may come, in turn, to be considered in this Lecture) no less distinctly, than their other captivities had been.

For, to all these predictions there must be added *one* more, which expressly asserts the return of this people, in some future age, from their long and wretched dispersion: for *blindness, in part, only, hath happened to Israel*; and that again, *till the fulness of the Gentiles be come in* [s]. This, St. Paul terms *a mystery*: and yet the antient prophets had a glimpse of it, when they foretold, *that the Lord would not make a full end of them* [t], and that a remnant of them *should remain, and should return in the latter days* [u]. Moses himself, who had denounced such heavy judgements upon them, and of so *long continuance*, during their dispersion, had mingled, with his woes,

[s] Rom. xi. 25.

[t] Jer. xlvi. 18.

[u] Isai. x. 21. Ezek. vi. 8.

this one note of mercy—*And yet for all that, when they lie in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them UTTERLY and to break my covenant with them* [w].

Consider these predictions, and compare them with the present and past state of this people for seventeen hundred years; and see, if there be nothing to take your attention, or, rather, your astonishment, in the completion of them.

Why is this dreadful vengeance, *singular* in its circumstances, and never yet experienced by any other people on the face of the earth, why is this peculiar vengeance executed on the Jews?—Or, whatever the *cause* may be, is not the *fact*, such as was predicted?

“The predictions, you will say, have the appearance of being fulfilled. But

[w] Lev. xxvi. 44.

where

where is the wonder, that a people, distinguished by a *singular* religion, and above measure *addicted* to it, should continue to exist under that distinction, and should be every where known by it? That a people, on account of their profession, more than
o/ commonly obnoxious to the other religious sects, among whom the earth hath been chiefly parceled out—to the *Heathen*, for their unconquerable aversion to idolatry—to the *Christians*, for the atrocious murder of their founder—to the *Mahometans*, for the constant rejection of their prophet—should be the scorn and outcast of all three; and that, being excluded from the only country to which they have any attachment, they should be vagabonds on the earth, and should disperse themselves indifferently through every quarter of it, as caprice, or interest, or convenience, invites them? That, lastly, being thus distinguished from all men, and thus at enmity with all, they should never be suffered to enter into any
other

other civil community, or to establish a distinct community of their own?"

But the wonder doth not lie, altogether, where these questions seem to place it. That the Jews, while they profess themselves such, should be thus treated, may be natural enough: but that they should *continue*, for so many ages, under such treatment; every where and always spurned, reviled, oppressed; yet neither worn out by this usage; nor induced by it to renounce their offensive profession, and take refuge in the mass of people; among whom they live; that neither time, nor custom, nor suffering, should get the better of their bigotry or patience; but that they should still subsist a numerous, a distinct, a wretched people, as they do, to this day—all this hath something prodigious in it, which the common principles of human nature will not easily explain [*].

[*] Hear the profound and reflecting M. Pascal—
L'état où l'on voit les Juifs est une grande preuve de la

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We, who admit the divine origin of their religion; and adore, with them, the extraordinary providence, by which their polity was so long administered and upheld; can better, than any others, explain this difficulty. For, what so likely to produce an invincible attachment to their Law, as the abundant evidence, they had of its authority? But neither will this account of the matter be found satisfactory. For, as if on purpose to discredit this solution, their history informs us, That *ten*, of the twelve tribes, which originally composed their nation, did, in fact, disappear under their last captivity, and were, in a good measure at least, absorbed in it. If such, then, was the fate of *Israel* in its dispersion, within the compass of not many generations, and yet the relics of *Judah*

Religion. Car c'est une chose étonnante de voir ce peuple *subsister* depuis tant d'années, et de le voir *toujours misérable*—et, quoique il soit contraire, D'ÊTRE MISÉRIABLE, et DE SUBSISTER, il subsiste néanmoins toujours malgré sa misère. PENSEES, p. 115.

are

are still preserved in all countries to this day, what better or other reason can we assign for this difference of fortune in two branches of the same people, equally attached to the same divine Law, than that the *former* were left to the natural consequences of a dispersion, and that the *latter* were purposely kept from being affected by them, as the prophecies had distinctly foretold?

If it be still said, "That there is nothing more extraordinary in this continuance of the Jews, under their dispersion, than of other religionists in like circumstances; of the *Christians* for instance, under the Turkish dominion;" the cases (to say nothing of the difference in point of *time*) are, in many respects, entirely unlike.

The Asiatic CHRISTIANS derive a confidence, and some degree of protection, from the many flourishing Christian empires, which subsist in other quarters of the world.

THEY, can perform all the duties of their religion, as perfectly in the countries, where they reside, as in any other.

THEY, have the future hopes of the Gospel, the proper sanction of their Law, to support them in all the distresses, to which their Christian profession may, at present, expose them. What is it to them, as St. Austin well observed in a like case, that they suffer for a season in a strange land: when even in their *own*, that is, a Christian country, they are still obliged, by the principles of their religion, to consider themselves, *as strangers and pilgrims on the earth* [y]?

The condition of the JEWS, on the other hand, is widely different. THEY, profess a religion, founded on temporal promises, only: and how miserably these have failed

[y] — Multò minus nomen criminandum, in captivitate sacratorum suorum, qui supernam patriam veraci fide expectantes, *etiam in suis sedibus peregrinos se esse noverunt.* Aug. De Civ. Dei, l. i. 15.

them,

them, the experience of many ages hath now shewn.

The JEWS, are shut out from the only country in the world, where the several rites and ordinances of their religion can be regularly and *lawfully* observed.

The JEWS, have, besides, the sensible mortification of knowing, that all their brethren of the dispersion are every where in equal distress with themselves; and that there is not one Jewish state or sovereignty subsisting on the face of the whole earth.

It follows, that in the JEWS, we find nothing but their *destiny*, so plainly read to them by their own prophets, as well as ours, to account for their long continuance in their present dispersion: whereas, the *Asiatic Christians* have many resources of comfort within themselves; and may subsist, in Mahometan countries, on the same general motives and inducements, which sustain the courage of other unhappy men.

Yet, notwithstanding the advantages, here pointed out, on the side of the Asiatic Christians, the *fact* is, that they are reduced to a very small number, and are insensibly melting away under the oppressions of their Ottoman masters; so that in no long time, if that enormous tyranny should be permitted to continue, they may, not improbably, quite vanish out of those countries, where they had formerly so many and flourishing churches: whereas, the Jews continue every where to abound in great numbers; they thrive under their oppressions; and seem to multiply amidst their distresses; as if the order of things were reversed in regard to them, and the same causes operated to the conservation of this people, which tend so naturally to the waste and destruction of every other.

Still, I have another reflexion, or two, to make on this interesting subject.

1. It deserves to be considered, that the *natives* of any country, though subdued
and

and enslaved by a foreign nation, may, indeed, subsist very long under that distinction. Thus, the Gentoo Indians have preserved their name and race, under their Mahometan invaders: and thus, the Moors, if they had not been violently expelled, might have continued a distinct people for many ages, in their old Spanish quarters. But that small colonies of men, transported into *strange* and populous nations, should preserve a distinct existence, and not insensibly moulder away, and mix themselves with their numerous native masters; This, I think, is without example in the history of mankind. If the Jews might be expected to abound any where, it should, methinks, be in Judæa; where the sight of the *holy land*, and the memory of their past fortunes, might invigorate their prejudices, and perpetuate their attachment to the Jewish name and worship. But it so happens, that the number of Jews in that country hath now for many ages

been inconsiderable, while they swarm in every other.

2. It should, further, I think, be observed, that a *sect*, whether you will call it of *religion*, or *philosophy*, may subsist through a long tract of ages; I mean, that certain opinions may continue to be professed by some people, or other, without intermission; as may be true of the *doctrine* concerning *the two principles*, at all times so prevalent in the east; of that species of eastern *idolatry*, which consists in the worship of *fire*; and in other instances. But that these opinions, in circumstances any thing like those of the Jews, should still be professed not only by some, but by the *same* men, that is, by men known to be of the same extraction, as well as of a certain persuasion; this, again, is, I think, a circumstance of great singularity, and altogether unprecedented in the case of any other people. Who knows, of what race or family the present Manichees are descended,

scended, or the professors of the old Persian idolatry? The followers of the Mosaic law, are every where known to be of the stock of Abraham. They are distinguished in all places, as being Jews by *descent*, as well as by *Religion*.

3. Supposing, what I think cannot be shewn, that the history of the world furnishes an instance or two of a people circumstanced in all respects, as the Jews are; these extraordinary cases would not much abate the wonder, we are now contemplating. For how happened it, that a prophecy delivered above three thousand years ago concerning the fate of a *particular* people, should be so exactly verified, as it has hitherto been, when that fate is so far from being a common one, that it has only taken place, in one or two instances besides, within the compass of so many ages? And still more, how should it enter into the head of Moses to deliver this prophecy, when, at the time of his delivering it, he had absolutely no instance before his

his eyes of such fate, in the case of *any* people?

These things, then, deserve to be well and seriously considered.

Lastly, We believe, on the faith of the sacred oracles, that the Jews shall *never be destroyed utterly*, but shall exist a distinct people, as they have hitherto done, *till the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled*, But here, you will say, the prophets indulged a natural prejudice in favour of their own nation; it being the way of all people to delight in such dreams of *existence and perpetuity*. It may be so: But see, whether this *dream* hath ever yet been so far realized, in the case of any other people. The Romans, for instance, were as partial to themselves, and doted as much on the idea of their *perpetuity*, as the Jews. But what now is become of their *eternal empire*? Consider, therefore, the singular fate of the Jews through so many ages, and see whether it be not credible from what is past, that the prophet was moved by
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something more than a spirit of *national vanity*, when he said, *Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the Lord, for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee, BUT I WILL NOT MAKE A FULL END OF THEE [2].*

To these prophecies concerning *Jerusalem*, and the *Jews*, I add

III. *A third, concerning* THE CALL AND CONVERSION OF THE GENTILES TO CHRISTIANITY.

This prophecy is very remarkable, whether we consider—the *matter of it*—the *persons, by whom it was delivered*—or, the *manner, in which it hath been fulfilled*.

1. As it had been declared from the beginning, that in the promised seed, *all the nations of the earth should be blessed*, so the Gospel, or, the good tidings of that blessing, was, in due time, to be communicated to *all nations*. Further still, this Gos-

[2] Jer. xlv. 28.

pel was not only to be published to all nations, but to be acknowledged and received by them. There are numberless prophecies to this purpose in the books of the Old Testament: prophecies, which say expressly—*that God would give unto the Messiah the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession* [a]—*that from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, his name should be great among the Gentiles* [b]—*It is a light thing, says the prophet Isaiah, addressing himself, in the person of the Almighty, to the Messiah, that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation to the end of the earth* [c]. And Jesus himself, when he commissioned his Apostles to publish his doctrine, did it in these

[a] Ps. ii. 8.

[b] Mal. i. 2.

[c] Is. xlix. 6.

words—GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD,
AND PREACH THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREA-
TURE [d].

It is unquestionable, therefore, from
these and other passages [e], that not the
Jews only, but all nations were to be in-
structed in the Christian faith; that the
Gospel was to be an universal religion;
and that, thus, the Messiah was to be, in
every sense, the Saviour of mankind.
There is no doubt, I say, but that such
is the language of the prophets; and that
they clearly suppose the dispensation of the
Gospel to have these views, and to termi-
nate in this event.

But now, let any man consider with
himself, what it is to proselyte the whole
race of mankind to one faith, and to one
religion. Let him revolve in his mind
this great, this magnificent idea. Let

[d] Mark xvi. 15.

[e] The reader may see many of them collected, and
the general argument from them well enforced, by Mr.
Bullock, in his *Vindication*, Part II.

him,

him, next, turn his thoughts on what history and experience may suggest to him on the subject. And then let him tell us, whether there be not something extraordinary in this project: whether, indeed, there be any other example of this sort in the annals of mankind.

In the old world, the institutors of *pagan religion* looked no further, than to single communities: each destined his ceremonies for his own people only; and never presumed so far on the truth or importance of his religious scheme, as to set it up for a standard of belief or worship to the other nations of the earth. Even the *Jewish ritual* was so constituted as to respect the Jews only, and was even practicable nowhere but in the land of Judæa.

But this idea of universality was equally strange to the *Doctors*, as to the Legislators, of the ancient world. Sects of philosophy, there were many; espoused with zeal, and propagated with industry; and some of them, of no small extent. Yet the

the most sanguine, or the most successful of these speculatists never conceived so much as the idea of bringing all nations into their system. They presumed, indeed, that truth, or probability at least, was on the side of their favourite opinions; but they beheld a neglect of them in others, with a sort of indifference; and, contenting themselves with their own superior skill or felicity, left it to the rest of the world to philosophize in their own way, and on their own principles. They seem not to have thought it either necessary or possible, that their own sentiments should become the standing, universal persuasion of mankind.

Ambition, I know, hath been sometimes enterprizing enough to think of subduing the whole world. But this was the ambition of *power*, not of religion, or philosophy: it was an ambition to subdue the *bodies*, not the minds of men. This *last* was a project, too big for a Cæsar or an Alexander, much more, for a Numa or
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an Aristotle, to entertain. And I think it certain, that, except in the scheme of Christianity, or such other schemes of revelation, as have been copied from it [*f*], we shall no where find the idea of *universality* to have taken place in any religious or philosophical sect whatsoever [*g*].

If then this idea was *familiar* to the Jewish and Christian prophets, you will, at least, conclude that this circumstance is remarkable enough to engage your attention; and you will naturally ask, how it

[*f*] As in the case of *Mahometanism*, for instance.

[*g*] What the Philosopher Celsus thought of such a project, we learn from a curious passage in Origen. It being usual with the Christians of that time, as of every other, to *pray for the conversion of the whole world to the Christian faith*, the philosopher laughs at the extravagance of this petition. He observes upon it, *ὅτι ὁ τῦτο αἰσχυροῦσιν οἰδεὶς εὐδὲν*. The words are not easily translated. But the *meaning* of them is, That he regarded an universal agreement in one mode of religious belief, as a perfect chimæra: and the *turn* of the words is so contrived, as to express the utmost contempt of those, who, in their supreme ignorance of mankind, could entertain so senseless an idea. *Contr. Celsum*, l. viii. sub fin.

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came to pass that those prophets should adopt so strange a fancy, which appears not to have entered into the views or conceptions of other men.

When you are in this train of inquiry, it will surprize you still more to find,

2. *By what persons these prophecies, so remarkable for the matter of them, were announced.*

The publishers of this extraordinary doctrine were, in one word, JEWS: that is, men of the most narrow and contracted minds; men, brought up in the highest conceit of themselves, and in the utmost scorn and contempt of the Gentiles; men, accustomed to think themselves the only favourites of heaven, and to regard the rest of the world, as outcasts of its providence; men, in short, induced, partly, by the genius of their religion, ill understood, and partly, by their carnal temper, long indulged, to believe with assurance the perpetuity, the eternity of their divine law; and to deem it impossible that God should reign

anywhere but in the land of Israel, or should impart his blessings to any, that lived out of the Jewish pale.

Was it, now, to be expected of such men, as these, that they should enlarge their ideas so far as to form the project of a new and universal religion; a religion, not imprinted outwardly on the flesh, but *written in the heart*; a religion, that was to supersede and evacuate the law of Moses, to which they were so immoderately addicted, and to enlighten and bless and save the heathen, whom they so perfectly despised and abhorred?

You will suspect, perhaps, that the meaning of these prophecies was no more, than that the Jewish Law should finally prevail over all other Laws, and be the sole predominant religion of the whole earth: a prejudice, very likely, it may be said, to possess the minds of such a people as the Jews; and suitable enough to that zeal, which prompted them *to compass sea and*

and land, as Jesus himself observed of them, to make one proselyte [b].

But the contrary is apparent from the structure of the Jewish Law, which, as I said, was so contrived, that it could not be observed out of Judæa—from the tenour of that Law, addressed only to the house of Israel, and not obligatory to any other people—from express declarations of the prophets themselves; who call the dispensation of the Messiah, a new Covenant, a covenant written in the heart, in opposition to the law of circumcision [i]; who say, that the Lord will create new heavens and a new earth, that is, in the prophetic language, will institute a new dispensation of religion, different from that, which he

[b] Matth. xxiii. 15.

[i] Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers—but this shall be my covenant that I will make with the house of Israel, after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, &c. Jer. xxxi. 31—33. See also Jer. iii. 16.

had given to the Jews, and *subvert* of it [k]; who, lastly, speak of this dispensation, as of *one*, that should be established under *a new name*, and should be embraced by the Gentiles, as *such*, that is, by men, converted immediately to this new religion from their state of Gentilism, without passing through the strait gate of the Jewish Law [l].

Judge, then, whether the prophets did not mean more than a *profelytism* to their own religion, when they predicted, and in such terms, the future conversion of the Gentiles; and whether such ideas, as these, could ever have entered into the hearts of Jews, if something, besides and above the natural suggestion of their own minds, had not inspired their prophecies.

[k] For behold, *I create new heavens and a new earth*: and the *former shall not be remembered nor come into mind*, Is. lxxv. 17.

[l] The *Gentiles* shall see thy righteousness, and all Kings, thy glory: And thou shalt be *called by a new name*, which the mouth of the Lord shall name. Is. lxxii. 2.

Add

Add to all this, if you please, that Jesus was himself a Jew, and (to regard him as a man only) in the lowest class of the Jews, that is, of the most confined and bigoted education; and yet was not restrained by his prejudices from giving that sublime command to his followers — Go AND TEACH ALL NATIONS.

But enough on the *doctrine* itself, and on the *character* of its teachers. It remains only

3. To add one word, *on the manner in which this prophecy*, concerning the conversion of the Gentile world, *appears to have been completed.*

There are especially two prophecies on this subject, which merit our attentive consideration. ONE of them asserts, that the conversion of the Gentile world shall take its rise from small and very unpromising beginnings, and yet shall prevail speedily and to a vast extent; the OTHER, that it shall prevail by pacific means only, without the intervention of any force or violence whatsoever.

I. The FORMER of these prophecies is expressed thus—*A little one shall become a thousand; and a small one a strong nation: I the Lord will hasten it in his time* [m]. In allusion to this prophecy, concerning the rise and progress of Christianity, is that parable of our Lord applied to the kingdom of heaven—the kingdom of heaven, says he, is like to a grain of mustard-seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree: so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof [n]. And, with regard to the celerity with which this tree should grow up, we have a prophecy from Christ himself, and that wonderfully fulfilled—that his Gospel should be preached to all the world for a testimony to all nations, before the destruction of Jerusalem, or within forty years from the date of the prophecy.

[m] Is. lx. 22.

[n] Matth. xiii. 31, 32.

Now,

Now, consider the state of the Gospel, at our Lord's ascension. It was left in the hands of a few, mean, unlearned, dispirited persons: without any countenance from authority; and with every difficulty, every terror, opposed to them, and placed distinctly within their view. *Matth. xxiv. 9.* Yet these men were commissioned to spread this Gospel through the world, and had an express promise, that they should succeed in their attempt. Against all appearance, the success followed. In less than half a century, *the sound of the Gospel went out into all lands;* and, within three centuries from the death of Christ, Christianity ascended the imperial throne; *and had the utmost parts of the earth for its possession.*

To encrease the wonder, this amazing revolution was brought about, by *peaceful methods only*; as was, likewise, foretold.

2. In the LATTER of the *two* prophecies, to which I before alluded.

Jesus himself quotes this prophecy from Isaiah in the following words—*Behold, my*

servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment, i. e. declare a new Law, to the Gentiles.

He shall not strive, nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets; a bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, i. e. (as all interpreters explain these proverbial expressions) he shall not employ the least degree of force or violence in the propagation of this law, till he send forth judgment unto victory, till it finally prevail against all opposition; And in his name shall the Gentiles trust. Matth. xii. 18—21.

Let any man read the history of Christianity, from its first publication in Judæa, to the conversion of Constantine, and then see whether this prophecy hath not been exactly and illustriously completed. The followers of Jesus were numerous enough, long before the empire became Christian, to have attempted the way of force, had

it

it been permitted to them [o]: and the insults, the oppressions, the persecutions, which they suffered from their Pagan enemies, were enough to provoke the most passive tempers to some acts of hostility and resistance [p]. But every one knows, that they had recourse to no arms, but those of

[o] Si enim et hostes *exertos*, non tantum vindices occultos, agere vellemus, *desset nobis vis numerorum et copiarum?* Tertull. Apologet. c. 37.

[p] Could it be *foreseen*, that nothing of this sort would happen? When the *Reformation* was set on foot in Germany, Luther and his adherents resolved to carry it on in the spirit of the Gospel, that is, by *peace measures*. But how soon did passion and policy strike in, to drive them from this purpose! The Catholics were intolerant: the Reformed grew powerful: and then, what was too naturally to be expected, followed.

If it be said, that the Gospel hath not been always propagated, *without force*; I acknowledge, it has not: but then I observe, 1. that it was incontestably so propagated, till the conversion of the Roman empire; in which event, alone, the prophecies appear to have had a reasonable completion: 2. that the *force employed*, has generally been the force of one Christian sect, directed against some other (in which scandalous contentions the prophecies have no concern), not in the propagation of Christianity itself in unbelieving countries: 3. that the *way of force*, when professedly
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the spirit: they took no advantage of distracted times, to raise commotions in behalf of the *new* religion, or to suppress the *old* one: *a bruised reed did they not break, and smoking flax did they not quench*: yet with *meekness*, and patience, and suffering by piety, by reason, by the secret influence of a divine blessing attending on these feeble efforts, the doctrine of the cross insensibly gained ground, spread itself far and wide, and in the end became *victorious* over all the rage and power and sophistry of an unbelieving world [q].

used against unbelievers, though, in *some* cases, it has contributed to the enlargement of Christ's kingdom, has yet, in *others* (where, too, the utmost force and zeal were combined) very signally failed of success; of which the *crusades against the Mahometans* afford a striking instance: and 4. lastly, that we expect the *final universal* prevalence of the Christian faith from the same spiritual arms only, which were first employed with such success in the propagation of it.

[q] An eminent writer, with the view, indeed, of disgracing the Reformation, hath set this matter in a very just light: "Que nos freres, says he, ouvrent donc les yeux; qu'ils les jettent sur l'ancienne Eglise, qui durant tant de siècles d'une persecution si cruelle ne s'est jamais

That

That this victory hath not been, hitherto, so complete, as to answer the promise

échapée, ni un seul moment, ni dans un seul homme, et qu'on a vûe aussi soumise sous Diocletien, et même sous Julien l'apostat, lorsqu'elle remplissoit déjà toute la terre, que sous Neron et sous Domitien, lorsqu'elle ne faisoit que de naître: C'EST LÀ QU'ON VOIT VÉRITABLEMENT LE DOIGT DE DIEU."

Hist. des Variations, l. x. c. 53.

The finger of God, as the learned writer says, was indeed conspicuous in this conduct of the primitive Christians, because it fulfilled the prophecies (so unlikely to be fulfilled) concerning the manner in which Christianity was to obtain an establishment in the world. If the conduct of the reformed had not this merit, it was because the prophecies did not extend to the reformation, of Christian religion, but to the introduction and first settlement of it. The agents, in this last work of providence, were therefore left to the natural influence of their passions, and they acted too frequently as those passions impelled them.

For the rest, how far the general precepts of the Gospel require a passive submission and non-resistance to outrageous intolerance, whether absolutely, and in all cases, is a point of nice discussion; in which I take no part, at present, because I am not now making the apology of the reformed, but shewing the completion of the prophecies concerning the propagators of Christianity: and the wonder to see them so punctually com-
of

of an *absolute universality*, we readily acknowledge; but are in no pain for the event [*r*]; as the same oracles, which have thus far been verified, suppose the present condition of things; and, what is more, assure us of a time to come, when *the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in*.

One word more, and I have done. If it be now thought, that these THREE prophecies—*concerning the destruction of Jerusalem—the dispersion of the Jews—and the call of the Gentiles*—have been clearly accomplished; and yet were of that nature, that no human foresight could deliver them, nor any probable conjuncture of human affairs account for the accomplishment of them, you will conclude that they were

pleted, is not lessened, but increased, by supposing, that the precepts of the Gospel leave mankind to the free use of their natural rights, in the case of extreme violence and injustice.

[*r*] *The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lye: though it tarry, wait for it, because it shall surely come, it will not tarry. Habakkuk, ii. 3.*

truly

truly divine, and that we do not abuse your credulity in alledging such prophecies, in proof of our holy religion. You will see and acknowledge that there *are* prophecies, recorded in scripture, *concerning the Christian Church*: and that *these* prophecies, in particular, concerning it, have been remarkably fulfilled. Ye will, therefore, the less wonder to find, that there are still *other* prophecies, relative to the kingdom of Christ, as administered in this world; and will, of course, be disposed to consider, with less prevention, what may further be said in support of them.

THE END OF VOL. I.

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